

Dunkin' Donuts CEO: Our Sandwiches Are Snacks, Not Lunch

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NEW YORK (AP) — If you're grabbing a sandwich at Dunkin' Donuts, the chain wants you to consider it a snack, not a full lunch.

The chain has been expanding its sandwich offerings to bring in more business during the afternoon. But Dunkin' Brands CEO Nigel Travis said those sandwiches — which include fried chicken and grilled cheese varieties — shouldn't be considered lunch.

"We're not moving into lunch. We're in snacking. We never talk about lunch," Travis said in an interview.

Travis said Dunkin' is focused on two growth areas — breakfast and snacking. The strategy is a reflection of how people are increasingly eating several smaller meals a day, rather than sticking to just breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Dunkin', which is based in Canton, Massachusetts, isn't the only company going after the snacking business. It's a strategy being used by numerous fast-food chains to get people in the door between meals and help boost overall sales. Taco Bell, for example, has been featuring smaller bites positioned as snacks to attract customers during the late afternoon. And McDonald's snack wraps and fruit smoothies are designed to draw people throughout the day.

For its part, Dunkin has historically done most of its business before 11 a.m. To attract more customers after that morning crush, it rolled out a lineup of deli-like sandwiches in 2012. The offerings are relatively compact so they can be easily eaten on the go, but most have north of 400 calories.

The chicken salad sandwich, which is served on a croissant, has 580 calories, according to Dunkin's website. The fried chicken sandwiches range from 590 calories to 660 calories, depending on the toppings. The Texas toast grilled cheese sandwiches have 510 calories, if you don't include ham or bacon. Even the tuna salad wrap, which sound healthier, has 520 calories.

What exactly qualifies as a snack varies from person to person. But Lauri Boone, a registered dietitian, in the Rochester, New York, area, said people should think of snacks as a "small, satisfying portion of food that can help curb hunger or a craving between meals."

Some examples she gave were a handful of nuts and a piece of fruit, a small cup of yogurt, or a handful of trail mix. When asked whether a 500-calorie sandwich could be a snack, she said no.

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"That is a meal," she said. "I can't think of a good example where I would recommend a 500-calorie snack."

Dunkin' does offer some lighter sandwiches, however. The turkey, cheddar and bacon sandwich has 440 calories and the chain recently introduced a grilled chicken flatbread sandwich that has 360 calories.

Travis noted that the chain's lighter "DDSmart" sandwiches that are under 400 calories have proved popular, a reflection of the growing interest in healthy eating.

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