

What's Popping?

Article written by Natalie Sehi, MS, RD, (nsehi2@unl.edu) Extension Educator

Popcorn is a favorite snack for many families. Popcorn comes in different colors, including red, blue, yellow, and white. It is easy to eat while playing cards or board games. Most people know popcorn is a favorite snack at sporting events and movies.

What makes popcorn a great snack? It is a whole grain, which means it contains the germ, endosperm, and pericarp (also known as the hull) and it is low in calories. Air popped popcorn has 30 calories per cup. Oil-popped popcorn has 35 calories per cup. It also can be flavored with different herbs and spices to fit your taste, or mixed with dried fruit, nuts, and cereal for a quick trail mix. To keep popcorn as a healthy snack, be careful when adding salt and butter, as they will add sodium, fat, and calories.



Fun facts about popcorn:

- According to the USDA, Nebraska and Indiana grow most of the popcorn.
- Nebraska produces an estimated 250 million pounds of popcorn per year—more than any other state.
- Americans eat around 14 billion quarts of popcorn every year.
- Popcorn can pop up to three feet in the air.
- If you made a trail of popcorn from New York City to Los Angeles, you would need more than 352,028,160 popped kernels.

Popcorn is not just for eating, check out the following ideas for other ways to use popcorn:

- **Stringing Popcorn:** These can be hung outside for birds to eat or hung on your Christmas tree.
- **Popcorn Air Hockey:** Use a straw to blow the kernels back and forth, or your hands as paddles to “volley” the kernel back and forth 20 times without letting it fall.
- **Popcorn Relay Race:** In teams, use spoons to transport popcorn back and forth.
- **Popcorn Basketball:** Flick a piece of popcorn into the basket (muffin tins, small cups, or your own mouth).

Kicked-up Popcorn

- 6 cups of popcorn
 - Topping Options: 2 teaspoons of one of the following (taco seasoning, Parmesan cheese, cinnamon-sugar, or herbs such as rosemary)
1. Wash hands with soap and water. Prepare popcorn according to package directions.
 2. Let popcorn cool a little and then add one of the toppings.
 3. Shake the popcorn in a bag or bowl to coat the popcorn. Enjoy!
- Makes 3 servings. Each serving contains: Calories 60, Total Fat .5g, Sodium 50mg, Total Carbohydrate 13g, Dietary Fiber 2g, Protein 2g.

This newsletter was peer-reviewed and updated in 2025. Check out more Family Fun on the Run articles: <http://go.unl.edu/familyrun>