

'Eating Smart' – How eating the right food can help you

Food not only provides us with nutrition, but also affects how our brain and bodies function. Whilst it is tempting just to grab whatever is to hand, thinking a little about what you choose to eat and drink during the day could boost your performance and stamina. Eating well may need a little more planning, for example you may choose to bring one or two things in from home, but doesn't need to be expensive or time consuming. This factsheet will give you some ideas to help you reach your potential.

Do you 'Eatwell'?

- Most of us believe that our diet is far healthier than it actually is. Try writing down everything you eat and drink over 2-3 days and see how it compares to the eatwell plate
- On average we should eat far more fruit and vegetables, more starchy carbohydrates and less fatty and sugary foods
- The eatwell plate below gives a guideline to the ideal proportions of food in our diet. You can find out more about the plate on the www.eatwell.gov.uk.



Boosting Breakfasts – the facts!

Eating breakfast is key to kick-starting our minds and bodies after a long night without food. People who eat breakfast regularly are found to have quicker reaction times, improved memory, and to perform better at a wide range of tasks than those who skip breakfast. Importantly for some of us, eating breakfast also improves mood in the mornings. Missing breakfast is also a risk factor for weight gain, increasing the chances of overeating later in the day. If you leave home early plan ahead and take something with you. Choose a carbohydrate rich breakfast to provide the brain with an essential boost of blood sugar. Brain boosting breakfasts include:

- A bowl of cereal with milk – topped with fresh or dried fruit
- Toast and a banana
- A marmite sandwich with some fresh fruit
- A 'light' cream-cheese filled bagel and some dried fruit
- A pot of fruit yoghurt and some malt loaf buttered with low-fat spread
- A home-made fruit & yoghurt 'smoothie' – whizz up and pop in a flask to take with you

Sustaining snacks

Essential when revising or taking exams! Boosting your energy levels with a mid-morning or mid-afternoon snack helps to improve attention, motivation, confidence, mood and energy levels. Starchy foods may even help us to cope better with stress. The best snack choices are from the

starchy carbohydrates group or fruit as they have a better Glycemic Index (energy release). Snacks rich in fats and sugars or protein are unlikely to boost performance so go easy on these.

If suitable snacks aren't readily available at school, you may need to bring them in from home. Fresh or dried fruit are ideal snacks, are very portable and will help you achieve your '5 a day'. Other snack ideas are:

A currant bun/fruit bread with low fat spread	A glass of semi-skimmed milk and a biscuit
A low-fat cereal or yoghurt bar	Rice cakes or crackers with low fat cheese
Breadsticks with low fat dip eg hummous	A couple of fruit biscuits

'Lifting' lunches

A moderate sized lunch, boosted by an afternoon snack, reduces drowsiness and improves reaction time and mood. The body has a natural efficiency 'dip' in the afternoon which happens whether we eat lunch or not. However large lunches make this worse so if you have job which needs high levels of afternoon concentration, it might be better to have your main meal later in the day. For ideas on packed lunches see www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/070924PackedLunches.pdf.

Top Tips for Lunch

- Avoid high fat meals ie deep fried food, high fat sandwiches and crisps. These are bad for our hearts, waistlines and afternoon concentration
- Base your meal on starchy carbohydrates eg. bread, jacket potatoes, pasta or rice
- Soup is a great lunch as it is very filling and nutritious and is great for using up leftovers.
- 'Supersize' on salad and vegetables. Try to make them fill half of your plate or meal
- Try not to rush lunch, taking time to enjoy a meal will help you feel more satisfied and fuller for longer

Love your liquids....a word on fluids

- Dehydration is a major cause of daytime fatigue and headaches
- Drinking 8 – 10 cups of fluid each day will keep you hydrated and help you to work well.
- Water is a great way to rehydrate and is calorie-free.
- Limit caffeine-rich drinks to around 4 a day. Other suitable drinks include diluted fruit juice, sugar-free squash, decaffeinated and fruit teas. Alcohol is dehydrating so try an avoid excessive consumption especially during exam time.

Delicious Dinners

You don't need to be a chef to cook good food. Avoid too many ready meals and pot snacks as these are generally higher in fat, salt and calories and can be expensive to buy. When you are on a budget, look for price offers on food, make a big batch and freeze some. Get together with your friends and make a big stir-fry, spag bol or chilli, split the cost and there will also be less waste (some even sell it to their friends!). Bulk out expensive meat with vegetables, rice, beans etc. You do not need to eat meat everyday, so go veggie a couple of times a week.

Energising Exercise

Don't forget too the role that exercise plays in keep us healthy and energetic. Building activity into your day such as walking during your lunch break, using stairs instead of lifts, and walking or cycling around is just as important as eating well

Other useful websites:

British Dietetic Associations Weightwise campaign www.bdaweightwise.com

British Dietetic Association Factsheets www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/index.html

Freelance Dietitians www.dietitiansunlimited.co.uk

Cancer Research UK info.cancerresearchuk.org/healthyliving

Student UK www.studentuk.com/page/eating-1

Bucks University Students Union http://bucksstudent.com/files/arc_Top_tips_for_exam_welfare_leaflet_link.doc