LEARN TO EAT HEALTHILY

COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (CAPS)

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY
Eating healthily is important at all ages and life stages, and is all about ensuring that you get enough of the nutrients essential for maintaining good health and well being. There are significant benefits to eating healthily including feeling energised and motivated, as well as improved concentration, memory and mood. For university students, eating healthily will assist you to perform as well as you can in your studies.
WHAT DOES EATING HEALTHILY MEAN?

According to the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating eating healthily means consuming a variety of foods from each of the five food groups every day in proportions that are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Australians. You can have a look at the table below for a summary of this information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The 5 Food Groups</th>
<th>Main Distinguishing Nutritional Characteristics</th>
<th>Recommended Daily Servings for Adults 19 - 60 Years</th>
<th>How much is 1 Serve? A few examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bread - Cereals - Rice - Pasta - Noodles</td>
<td>Carbohydrates - Iron - Thiamin</td>
<td>Men: 6-12 serves Women: 4 - 9 serves</td>
<td>2 pieces of sliced bread; 1/2 cup muesli; 1 cup cooked rice, pasta or noodles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vegetables - Legumes</td>
<td>Vitamin A</td>
<td>5 serves</td>
<td>1 medium potato; 1/2 cup spinach; 1/2 cup legumes (lentils etc); 1/2 cup other vegetables (tomatoes, capsicum etc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Vitamins - especially Vitamin C</td>
<td>2 serves</td>
<td>1 piece medium sized fruit (such as an apple, orange, mango, banana); 2 pieces of smaller sized fruit (such as kiwi fruit or plum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk - Yoghurt - Cheese</td>
<td>Calcium - Protein</td>
<td>2 serves</td>
<td>250ml milk; 200g yoghurt; 40g cheese (2 slices); 1 cup almonds; 1/2 cup pink salmon with bones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat - Fish - Poultry - Eggs - Nuts - Legumes</td>
<td>Protein - Iron - Zinc</td>
<td>1 serve</td>
<td>65-100g cooked meat/chicken (1/2 cup mince, 2 small chops); 80-120g cooked fish fillet; 2 small eggs; 1/3 cup cooked legumes or nuts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sometimes it can be difficult to assess if you are eating too much or too little, try this Kilojoules and Nutrient Calculator to get an indication of how much you are eating.

It is also important to know what’s in your food. Learn more about reading food labels.

It is important to eat a variety of food from all five of the food groups. Test your knowledge of the 5 food groups.
THE IMPACT OF EATING UNHEALTHILY

Making healthy choices is extremely challenging especially when we are stressed or under pressure. We all know that during these times it’s easy to skip meals and eat unhealthily. However, these are exactly the times when our brains and bodies need good nutrition the most!

Some typical nutrition choices we make under pressure include:

- Drinking too much caffeine (coffee, energy drinks)
- Eating foods with poor nutritional value (sugary, high saturated fat)
- Skipping meals or dieting
- Mindless munching or binge eating
- Forgetting to drink enough water
- Consuming too much alcohol

Unhealthy eating habits adversely impact our brain and body.

For example:

- **Blood sugar imbalances**, occur when we are skipping meals or eating the wrong foods, and can have a negative effect on mood and mental performance.
- **Too much caffeine**, such as coffee and energy drinks, can also have a negative effect on mental performance and productivity, as well as have a detrimental impact on sleep and increase levels of cortisol (a stress hormone) in the blood. Read more about what it means to drink *caffeine in moderation*.
- **Poor nutrition**, such as eating sugary, or foods with a high content of saturated fat, skipping meals, mindless eating and a reliance on fast food, can impact immunity so that we’re far more susceptible to illness (which is the last thing we want when we have things to do!).
- **Brain Functioning**, no one would argue that a healthy brain is required to do well at University and the brain needs healthy food and water. A lack of healthy food and not enough water can contribute to fatigue and headaches making it difficult to concentrate or reach high levels of mental performance. Also, skipping meals and dieting can contribute to poor concentration, low energy levels, mood swings, memory lapses and many other negative side effects.

Listen to learn tips about how to **eat healthy and feel fabulous**.

- **Eat breakfast**: Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Eating breakfast breaks the fast from hours of sleeping. If you want to achieve peak mental performance start the day with a meal low in fat, high in protein and low carbohydrates and sugar. Skipping breakfast can impair memory and mental performance.
- **Eat at regular intervals**: Be sure to eat all meals throughout the day to increase concentration, energy level and metabolism. People who skip meals often eat more at one time making it more difficult for a slowed metabolism to digest food.
- **Avoid restricting diets**: Restricting calories can create cravings, increased fat storage and low energy. Eating an insufficient amount of food can result in fatigue, decreased bone density, decreased metabolic rate and mood swings.
- **Drink water**: Water is essential to life. Water helps our bodies receive nutrients, eliminate waste, and digest food. Learn about the **functions of water in the body** and the harmful effects and symptoms of dehydration.
- **Dehydration** is caused by the loss of fluid and can quickly lead to cramps, headaches and nausea. Learn more about **water** and what drinks are best for our bodies.
- **Adhere to appropriate portion sizes**: Portions sizes are just as important as what we eat. To get an idea of appropriate portion sizes read food labels and measure it out if needed. Learn more about **portion sizes** for all food groups.
- **Try to incorporate super foods into your diet.** Super foods are nutrient-rich, health promoting food. Click here for a list of **super foods** from each of the food groups.
- **Meet your daily fruit & vegetable intake targets (2+5)**: Meeting your daily requirement of fruits and vegetables contributes to good health, protects against a number of diseases and helps maintain a healthy weight. Learn more about the **benefits of fruits and vegetables**. For easy tips to add **fruit and vegetables to meals** read more.
- **For those particular times when you are feeling stress and have a sugary or fatty craving**, this **healthy meal plan** might help. It is also a good idea to keep healthy snacks (fruit, nuts, muesli bars) with you at all times to reduce the chances of making an unhealthy choice.
Research has revealed that some foods can help concentration, motivation, and improve memory!

THE TOP BRAIN HEALTH FOODS:
- Omega-3 fatty acids found in fish oils can play an important role in maintaining brain functioning and may help reduce the effects of depression and Alzheimer’s. Fish, particularly wild salmon is one of the healthiest foods we can eat. Salmon as well as other fish are a rich source of Omega-3 fats, high in protein and low in saturated fat. Omega-3 can also be taken in a pill form as a supplement. Read more to learn more about the benefits of eating fish.
- Blueberries are both a superfood and brain health food. Blueberries are commonly referred to as the “brain berry” because they are rich in antioxidants and improve learning capacity. A good tip is to buy extra blueberries when they are in season and cheaper and freeze them to eat at different times of the year. Blueberries are widely available and should be added to your daily diet.
- Nuts and seeds have been suggested to boost your brainpower and balance your moods. Nuts and seeds play a role in producing the chemicals needed for sleep and mood stabilization. Learn more about how nuts and seeds stabilize your mood.
- Whole grains such as oatmeal, whole-grain breads, brown rice and cereal increase blood flow to the brain, which means a higher quality and quantity of brain function. Whole grains have also been suggested to enhance memory and focus.

If you do not carry the rights snacks and foods with you, you are likely to become a victim of your food environment, eating what is on offer, when it is on offer.

Most likely you are on a limited student budget and don’t have much money to spend on healthy food. The good news is that eating healthy doesn’t have to be expensive and there are even websites to help with cheap, healthy, easy meal ideas! Having a healthy snack such as a piece of fruit or vegetables is much cheaper than the less healthy alternatives. Learn more about cheaper healthier food alternatives and the real costs of healthy foods.

ON A BUDGET:
Learn to shop smart, cook smart, eat well and save money. A healthy meal can be made for $2-3 a serving. Some are a bit less and others a bit more - up to $4 or so a serving. Read more about how to cut food bills and get ideas for money saving meals.

Saving money while eating healthy requires organisation and can take some planning. Learn how to plan in advance and get ideas for a healthy meal plan on a budget. Other tips to save money and eat health is limiting the amount of alcohol you drink, using your freezer for leftovers or for food that might expire before you have time to consume it, eating more vegetarian meals, buying in bulk and freezing extras instead of buying individual containers or packets, using your leftovers for other meals, avoid grocery shopping while hungry or on an empty stomach to reduce impulse buying, and purchasing foods in-season when they are cheaper.
If you are struggling with planning healthy meals or want some new ideas, see the below websites for a healthy seven day meal plan:

- Energy boost meal plan.
- Omega 3-rich meal plan.
- Summer Healthy Eating Plan
- Other meal plan ideas.

HEALTHY RECIPES:
Below are three different websites that have a variety of healthy recipes:

- Eat-smart recipes
- Better Health
- Vitality4Life

It is important to seek help early if you commonly engage in disordered eating patterns such as extreme dieting, starving yourself, bingeing, over exercising and/or poor body image perception. Many people struggle with eating disorders and if not treated they can lead to serious or life-threatening health consequences. Disordered eating is emerging as a norm in Australian society with 90% of 12-17 year old girls and 68% of 12–17 year old boys having been on a diet of some type. If your eating is disordered it is a good idea to see your GP for a medical check-up. If you have ongoing problems with disordered eating seek help.

Learn more about eating disorders and symptoms.

The Centre for Clinical Interventions offers an in depth online workbook on eating disorders. Read Overcoming Disordered Eating Part A and Part B if you have any concerns about your eating habits.

Learn more about the importance of how to learn to Manage Uncomfortable Feelings.
If after accessing all of the resources on our website you still need some further help in learning to eat healthily, please make an appointment with one of our counsellors at CAPS or see your doctor who can provide assessment to resources in your local area.