

The media are bursting with nutritional advice such as “Watch your fat intake,” “Eat plenty of fiber,” “Eat five fruits and vegetables daily,” “How to lose 25 pounds in three days.” With a multitude of sometimes conflicting information, it’s easy to feel overwhelmed, grab a candy bar, and go do something more fun than worrying about whether or not our diet is healthy. We all know that good nutrition is a critical factor in good health and top scholastic performance, but healthy eating sometimes ends up being sandwiched in between everything else that comes with starting college and is then placed on the back burner.

But a healthier diet can be simple! Think about what you usually eat during a typical day. Is it perfectly balanced with a variety of healthy foods? Probably not. But if you can make just a few small changes, you’ll notice some big rewards in a short time. Your diet probably needs a minor tune-up, not necessarily a major overhaul.

Eating regularly is a good place to start. How hungry are you when you usually eat? Rate yourself for a few meals and snacks: give yourself a score from 1-10 (1= absolutely starving, could eat fingernails or pencil shavings; 10= so full all you want to do is unbutton your pants and lay down). While you’re rating yourself, make sure to consider whether you’re having some of the other symptoms of hunger besides a growling belly: moodiness, shakiness, headache, inability to concentrate, reduced ability to perform simple calculations, fatigue, irritability, etc. Do these symptoms sound like a great way to feel while you’re trying to take a test??

Make a goal to “graze.” Eat something when you rate yourself as *moderately* hungry (score of 4 or 5) and stop eating when you’re *moderately* full (at 6 or 7). Not only does this habit of grazing keep your blood sugar stable and help your brain function at its best, but it can also help you to control your weight. It’s easier to be in charge of what you eat and how much you eat when you’re not ravenous.

A key to success is making sure you have healthy foods on hand when you do start to get hungry. It can really help to carry some snacks in your backpack and to have some easy to grab foods available for when you walk in the door after a long day at school. Some quick to pack, healthy, and inexpensive foods that don’t require refrigeration and can survive a backpack are: pretzels, boxed or canned fruit juice, dried fruit, trail mix, bagels, popcorn, dry roasted nuts, popcorn cakes (try caramel or cheese flavor), fig bars, fresh fruit, peanut butter sandwiches, crackers, dry cold cereal, granola bars, and muffins.

Short on money? If funds are limited while you are “tuning up” your diet, don’t give up. You can save money by eating more carbohydrate rich, plant foods

such as those at the base of the Food Guide Pyramid (potatoes, breads of all types, rice and other grains, fruits and vegetables). These foods are low in cost, easy to prepare, and high in nutrients. Try to buy seasonal produce for the least cost and best flavor: strawberries and asparagus in the spring, apples and yams in the fall, and oranges and winter squash during the cold months.

These high-carbohydrate foods are healthy and easy to carry, but keep in mind that the energy they provide lasts only a few hours. Protein-rich foods, on the other hand, will keep you going 3-4 hours. So, to prevent yourself from “running out of gas”, either add a bit of protein to your snacks/meals (meat, milk, cheese, yogurt, peanut butter, nuts, dried beans), or eat another snack in a few hours. Fat also causes foods to be digested more slowly. If you are trying to limit your fat intake, you may notice that you need snacks more often.

No time to eat? Here are some ideas to try:

- Set alarm for 5-10 minutes earlier.
- Set out your breakfast the night before.
- Eat while you’re walking to school or to the bus stop.
- Eat while you’re getting ready for school.
- Eat while driving, riding or walking across campus.
- Try more frequent snack times if you can’t find times for a whole meal.
- Drink a meal! Try Carnation Instant Breakfast or a fruit/yogurt smoothie.

Remember that there is no one perfect food or perfect diet. A healthy diet should be flexible, enjoyable, and satisfying but doesn’t need to be expensive or time consuming. Including a variety of foods that you like and that are good for you will help you succeed in this new exciting phase of your life.

Call the USU Student Health Center and make an appointment with the Registered Dietitian if you would like more information on the following topics.

- How to plan and prepare healthy meals
- Weight management
- Eating disorders
- Vitamin/mineral supplementation
- Individual nutritional needs related to food allergies, diabetes, etc.