Energy Maintenance Made Easy Through Good Nutrition

The beginning of the school year is packed with things that demand a lot of your energy and time. With a constantly growing list of “To Dos” and assignments, good nutrition doesn’t always make the cut. You may often opt for quick and easy foods that are usually the most convenient, but not necessarily the healthiest, and this isn’t totally your fault. In today’s food environment, it can be difficult to find healthy snacks in convenience stores or nutritious meals at restaurants. Nevertheless, if you dedicate a small fraction of time to plan and prepare your meals for the day—similar to how you make time to study for an exam or complete an assignment—you can ensure that you’ll always have a healthy snack on hand or know where to go to for a nutritious meal when your energy begins to drop. Having good food available to eat when you’re feeling hungry or tired will help improve your focus, energy, and comfort level throughout the day.

Benefits of Eating Regularly

- Maintain stable blood glucose throughout the day. This helps you avoid energy crashes and bouts of intense hunger.
- Promotes a healthy and balanced metabolism.
- Provides a steady flow of nutrients necessary to power your brain and muscles.
- Will prevent you from overeating at one point during the day, thus preventing inefficient energy storage and weight gain.

Food for Focus and Energy

Preparing your snacks and meals ahead of time will pay off if you choose the right kinds of foods. When you eat nutritious foods on a regular basis, you’re providing your body with a constant energy source. Your thought process will remain focused, your mind; clear, and you will most likely feel less tired. In many circumstances, the most convenient food items are not the healthiest, and will not give you the lasting energy your body and brain needs. This is why you have to choose foods wisely and ensure you have access to them when necessary. Planning and preparing your food at home can help guarantee this.

The Right Foods

Vegetables: Fill half of your plate with vegetables, or pack your sandwich with extra veggies. Vegetables are loaded with vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals that are beneficial for health. Try to eat a variety of colored vegetables because different colors usually mean different nutrients. At La Verde’s: Baby Carrots; Cherry Tomatoes, and Salad Bar.

Protein: Lean protein sources are the healthiest choice. Chicken and turkey breast are better options than red meat because they are naturally low in fat. Grill, broil, boil or pan fry your meats with little oil to avoid introducing extra fat during the cooking process. Plant proteins, such as nuts and legumes are also healthy options. At La Verde’s: Oscar Mayer, DeliFresh Chicken Breast and Turkey Breast; Starkist® Tuna Lunch To-Go; Eggs – hardboiled; Goya® canned beans.

Dairy: Stick with low-fat or non-fat options, such as low-fat cheese and non-fat yogurt. These food items, though low is fat, are still packed with protein, and will keep you satisfied and focused throughout the day! Also, be sure to check the sugar content of your yogurt because they can contain a lot of sugar, especially fruit flavored varieties. Try to stay below 10g sugar per 6-8 oz. serving of yogurt. Plain, Greek yogurt is the best choice. Add fresh fruit to plain yogurt to make it naturally flavorful and sweet. At La Verde’s: Breakstones® Low-fat Cottage Cheese; Low-fat Cheese Stick; Low-fat and Non-fat Milk; and Plain Greek Yogurt.
Fruit: Most fruits are naturally portable and very sweet. They are a great option for a midday pick-me-up snack or for dessert. Grab a piece of fruit instead of that cookie. Fruits provide essential vitamins and nutrients, as well as fiber that will give you energy without a drastic blood sugar spike followed by a crash. *At La Verde’s:* Apples; Peaches; Nectarines; Oranges; Grapefruit; Pears; Strawberries; Blackberries; and Blueberries.

Grains: You want to choose whole grains rather than refined grains whenever possible. Whole grains have more fiber, B vitamins, and healthy fats (Omega 3 and 6) than their processed, white grain counterparts. *At La Verde’s:* Whole Grain Breads (check nutrition facts label for “whole wheat flour” listed as first ingredient; Grainsfirst® Whole Grain Crackers; Roland® Quinoa (15 minute prep); and Quaker Oats® Quick 1-Minute.

Fats: Polyunsaturated fats, such as Omega 3s and 6s are important for vascular health. Fish, like salmon and tuna, as well as plant products, such as seeds, nuts, and vegetable oils, are good sources of Omega 3 and 6 fatty acids. Avoid saturated and trans fats—commonly referred to as bad fats—as much as possible. Bad fats can be found in packaged baked goods, chips, and various snack mixes. *At La Verde’s:* Sunflower Seeds; Dry-Roasted Almonds; and Starkist® Tuna Lunch To-Go.

**Tips for planning and preparing meals**

Preparing snacks and meals for your day on campus or away from home may take less time and be easier to do than you think. In addition, it may save you time later in the day. For example, taking an extra 20 to 30 minutes in the morning to prepare and pack food for the day can save you multiple trips to the dining hall, restaurants, or La Verde’s in the afternoon and evening. You’re also likely to save money! Planning what to eat for a whole week can be just as easy.

**First:**
- Choose specific meal and snack recipes you want to prepare for the week (or for the few meals you’ll be away from home).
- Make a grocery list from these recipes so you know exactly what you need, do not forget anything, and do not waste time in the grocery store.
  - *Tip:* Be sure to get different sized travel containers to store your food in if you don’t already have some. Grocery stores often have containers for sale.

**Second:**
- Prepare your meals. Making many meals at once saves on prep time later in the week. For example, making a large pot of soup on Sunday can mean meals for the following few days. Similarly, prepare three sandwiches at one time rather than just one. Store the extra two sandwiches in airtight containers in the fridge for lunches later that week.
  - *Tip:* Wait until the day you plan on eating your extra sandwiches to add sandwich spreads, like mayonnaise, mustard, etc. This will prevent the bread or wrap from becoming soggy.
- Separate the food you prepared into individual serving size containers and label them with the day of the week you plan on eating them.
  - *Tip:* Labeling food with the date it was made and the day you plan on eating it is a good idea because it may help you with portion control, remind you to eat a meal, or prevent you from eating food that is old and at risk of going bad.

**Third:**
- Throw your pre-made and pre-packaged food into a lunch box or your backpack, and head out for the day!
- Don’t forget your reusable water bottle!

**To Go Containers**
- Lunch Box!
- Reusable food bags, such as Reuseit®
- Tupperware – comes in all different sizes and materials. Check out Reuseit® for food containers as well. Some even have ice packs built in to keep your food cold.
- Jars (Mason Jars) – Affordable and easy.

**Healthy eating on the go @ MIT dining halls**

No time for food prep this week? Don’t even have time to eat a meal at the dining hall? Order a Carry Out Meal from any MIT dining hall and follow the rules of a balanced plate. Visit mit.cafebonappetit.com/carry-out-meals for more details.

Fill ½ your plate with fruits and vegetables, ¼ with whole grains (quinoa, whole wheat and multigrain breads and pastas, etc.) and ¼ with lean protein (eggs, chicken, salmon, etc.).

**Resources:**