SNACK SMART, STUDY STRONG!

A GUIDE TO HEALTHY EATING FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

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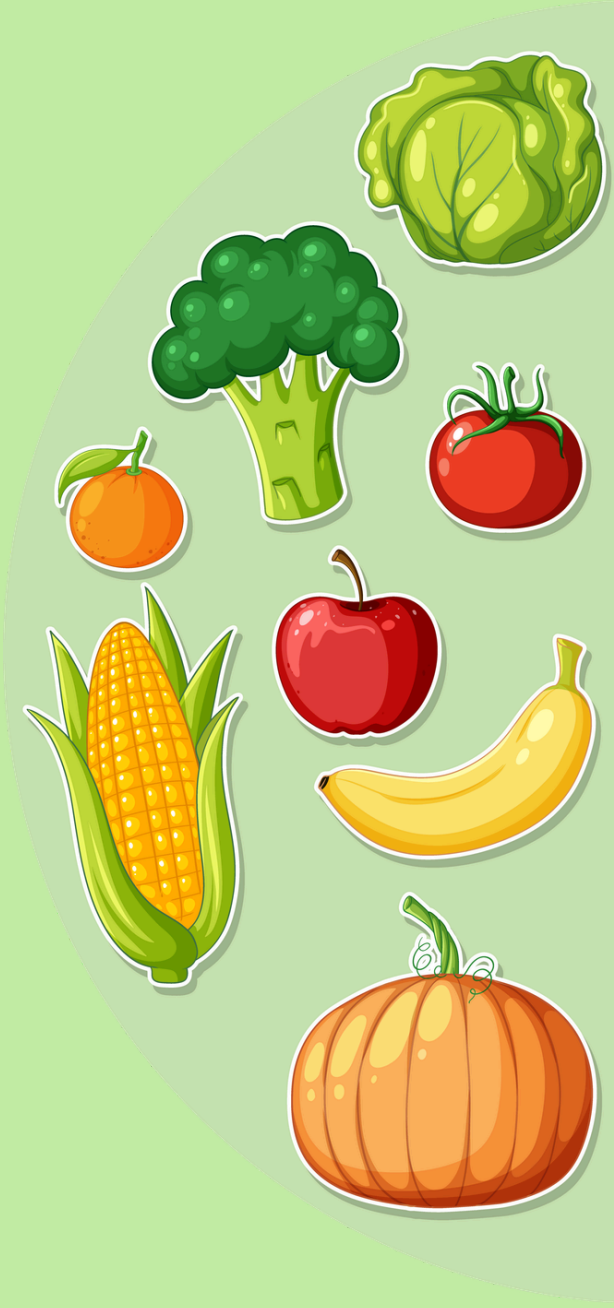
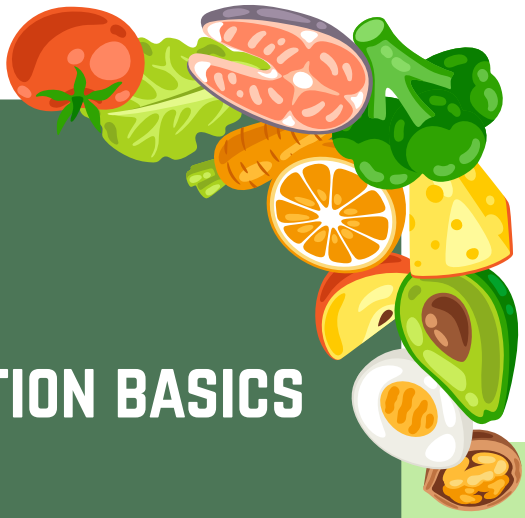


CHAPTER 1



Understanding nutrition basics

Meal planning on a budget

Healthy eating in a dining hall

UNDERSTANDING NUTRITION BASICS

What is nutrition?

Nutrition is the process of obtaining the food necessary for good health and growth. Nutrition includes the intake of both macronutrients and micronutrients in order for the body to function properly.

Macronutrients

Carbohydrates or carbs:

- Primary energy sources for the brain and the body
  - Found in fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes

Proteins

- Essential for muscle repair, immune function, and enzyme production
  - Found in lean meats, fish, eggs, dairy, tofu, and nuts

Fats

- Provide energy and support for cell function
  - Healthy fats are found in avocados, nuts, seeds, and olive oil

Micronutrients

Vitamins and Minerals

- Important for metabolism, immunity, and overall health
  - Found in spinach, lentils, and red meat

Calcium and Vitamin D

- These support bone heath and especially important for younger individuals
  - Found in dairy, leafy greens, and plant milks

B Vitamins

- These help convert food into energy
  - Found in whole grains, eggs, and legumes

Nutrition Labels

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size
Serving Pen Container

Amount per serving

Calories	Calories from Fat

		% Daily Value*
Total Fat		
Saturated Fat	0 g	0 %
Trans Fat	0 g	0 %
Cholesterol	0 g	0 %
Sodium	0 g	0 %
Total Carbohydrate	0 g	0 %
Dietary Fiber	0 g	0 %
Sugar	0 g	0 %
Protein	0 g	0 %

Vitamin A	0 %	Vitamin C	0 %
Calc	0 %	Iron	0 %

*Percent Daily Values are based on 2,000 calories diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calories needs.

Serving Size:

- States the typical amount consumed at once
- All the nutrients below are in relation to the serving size

Calories:

- The average amount of calories a college student should consume is about 2,000-2,500
- However, this will vary based on gender, weight, height, and physical activity

Cholesterol:

- Heart health aim for <300 mg/day

Sodium:

- Monitor for blood pressure <2,300 mg/day

Total Sugars:

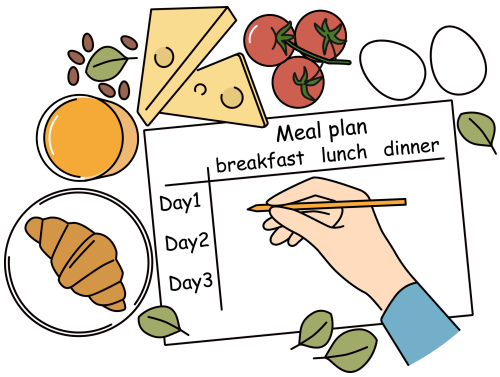
- Limit added sugar to <10% of daily calories

Daily Value

- Shows how much nutrients contribute to your daily diet

MEAL PLANNING ON A BUDGET

Grocery Shopping Tips



Planning Before Shopping

- Create a weekly meal plan
- Check pantry to avoid duplicate purchases

Shopping Smart

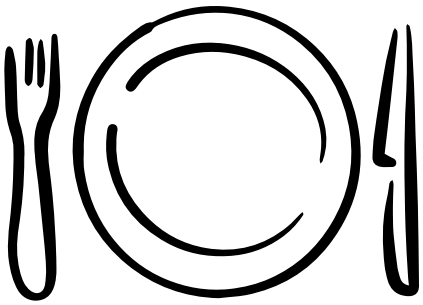
- Buying generic/store brand products are often the same quality and lower cost
- Shopping for seasonal produce is better for freshness and has better prices
- Avoid pre-cut items since these cost more and don't last as long

Budgeting Tricks

- Stick to a list because impulse buying can add up quickly
- Buy in bulk when you can for things such as rice or beans

Cost-Effective and health staples for college students:

- Grains: Brown rice, oats and whole wheat pasta
- Proteins: canned beans, lentils, eggs, tofu
- Dairy/Alternatives: Greek yogurt, milk, cheese
- Fruits and Veggies: Frozen mixed vegetables, apples, bananas, carrots
- Pantry Foods: Peanut butter, olive oil, spices
- Snacks: popcorn kernels, nuts, whole grain crackers



SAMPLE WEEKLY MEAL PLAN

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Breakfast: Oatmeal with Banana **Lunch**: Tuna salad wrap **Dinner**: Stir-Fry with rice and frozen veggies	**Breakfast**: smoothie (banana, peanut butter, oats, milk) **Lunch**: Chickpea bowl with quinoa **Dinner**: Chicken and veggies	**Breakfast**: Greek Yogurt and granola **Lunch**: Peanut butter sandwich and apple **Dinner**: Spaghetti with marinara sauce and side salad
Thursday	**Friday**	**Saturday**
Breakfast: Eggs and toast **Lunch**: Hummus wrap **Dinner**: Ground Turkey Tacos	**Breakfast**: Overnight oats **Lunch**: Egg sandwich with a side of fruit **Dinner**: Tofu or chicken stir-fry	**Breakfast**: Pancakes **Lunch**: Grain bowl **Dinner**: Baked sweet potatoes and steamed broccoli

Tips:
Swap in seasonal items to lower costs
Use left-overs as a way to save money
Make sure you don’t limit your diet too much

HEALTHY EATING IN A DINING HALL

Portion Control For Buffet Style Eating

We can use the "Plate Method" which is a visual tool for planning balanced meals

- ½ Plate: Vegetables and fruit
- ¼ plate: Lean proteins (ex grilled chicken, tofu, beans)
- ¼ plate: whole grains or starchy vegetables (ex brown rice, corn)

Tips:

- Start with smaller portions you can always go back for more if you're still hungry
- Eat slowly and mindfully since it takes 15-20 minutes for your brain to register fullness
- Limit sugary drinks and high calorie add ons

Navigating Limited Options in the Dining Hall

You can build a balanced meal from basic options:

- Salad bars, grain stations, and protein stations are great for building balanced meals

You also might want to combine simple foods to create something you would really enjoy:

- Pairing baked potatoes with steamed brocoli could be an option or making a chipotle bowl from ingredients around the hall

Ask for modifications:

- Also dont be aftaid to ask for substitutions or smaller portions.
- You can also ask for grilled instead of fried items.

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CHAPTER 2

Smart Snacking

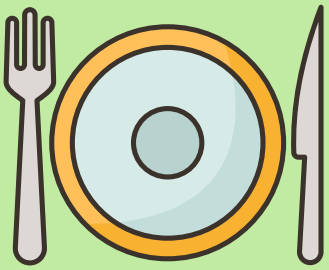
Time-saving meal prep strategies

Managing special diets

SMART SNACKING

Bring a Water Bottle

Always carry a refillable water bottle to stay hydrated. Sip throughout the day - don't wait until you're thirsty. Staying hydrated can curb cravings for sugary sodas.

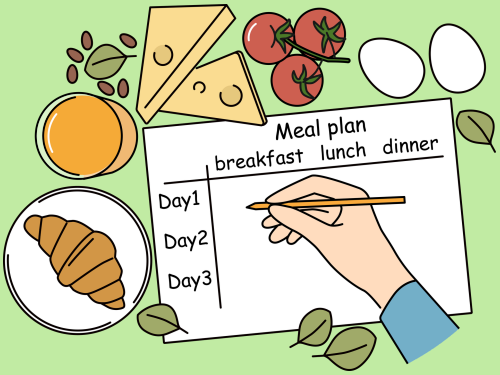


Eat a later dinner (if needed)

If you're staying up late, plan for a later dinner instead if a midnight fast food run. A healthy meal earlier in the night can keep you full and save you money.

Pack Healthy Snacks

Prep your own snacks like sandwiches, carrots with ranch or fruits. Packing meals or snacks helps you avoid vending machines and fast food when hunger hits.



Plan Ahead

Know your schedule and pack food accordingly. Being prepared keeps you from grabbing unhealthy, quick options when you're tired, or stressed.

SNACK TIMING & HEALTHY OPTIONS

for busy College Students

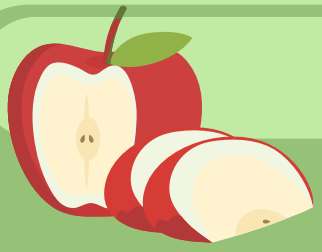
Snack Timing:
Why and When to Snack

- Between long classes
  - Refuel-when meals are spaced out
- Post-workout
  - Replenish energy and muscles
- Late-night studying
  - Support brain function

67%

of the brain's daily energy

Healthy Snack Ideas



Fresh fruit with nut butter

Trail mix (low sugar)

Snacks =1/3 of daily intake

Veggie sticks with hummus

Greek yogurt + granola +fruit

Riber-rich snacks reduce hunger

Bonus Brain-Boosters

- Nuts; almonds, walnuts & casheaus
- Dark chocolate: mood & memory
- Roasted chickpeas: crunchy & protein-high

TIME-SAVING MEAL PREP STRATEGIES

1. Organize Your Prep

Pick one day a week (Sunday) to meal plan, prep, and portion

- Review your weekend pick recipes that overlap ingredients
- Make a shopping list based on your meals
- Set aside 1-2 hours to prep - future you will thank you!

Stat: Meal prepping can save you up to 5-7 hours of cooking time each week!

2. Batch Cooking Basics

Cook meal staples in bulk to save time and money:

- Grains: Rice, quinoa, or oats
- Proteins: Chicken, ground turkey, beans
- Veggies: Roasted carrots, sweet potatoes, broccoli

Tip: Use tools like crockpots or instant Pots to prep big batches easily!

3. Simple, Balance Meals

Follow the easy formula:
Protein + Complex Carb + Veggie + Healthy Fat

- Chicken + Brown rice +Roasted broccoli + Olive oil drizzle
- Tuna Salad + Whole grain crackers + Baby carrots +Avocado slices
- Chili with beans + Cornbread +Side salad +Cheese topping
- Breakfast burrito (eggs Spanish) + Salsa +Yogart on the side

Stat: Students who meal prep are 25-70 percent more likely to stick to healthy eating goals.

Meal Prepping = Less stress, better meals, and more time for YOU!

4. Quick Tips for Success

- Shop in bulk for staples (oats, rice, chicken
- Choose recipes that go into containers for grab and go
- Mix and match: Rotate proteins and veggies with different sauces (like pesto or hummus) for variety

MANAGING SPECIAL DIETS

Eating Out or On Campus

How to navigate dining halls and resturants

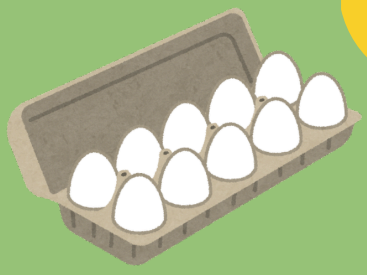
- Check menus for dietary info
- Ask about modifications
- Look for healthy options
- Watch beverage choices

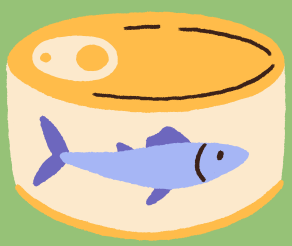
Affordable Healthy Alternatives

Budget-friendly swaps

- Oatmeal
- Brown rice
- Egg
- Beans
- Canned tomatoes
- Pasta
- Canned tuna
- Sweet potatoes
- Popcorn
- Bananas
- Oats

-Make sure to check dining hall schedules because missing a meal is common among students due to timing changes.
-Most college dining halls offer fresh fruits, vegetables, lean protein - try to avoiding defaulting to burgers and pizza every meal

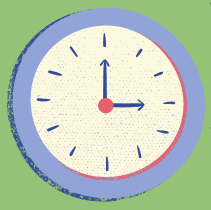




Mastering Meals

Your Guide to Smart Campus Eating

Make Time for Meals



-Stick to a regular meal schedule to avoid rushing and missing meals
-Eating every 3-4 hours helps prevent overeatting on junk food

Tip: Allow time to sit, eat, and enjoy your meals mindfully

Healthy Snacking for Study Sessions

Whole grain cereal

Oatmeal Packets

Popcorn

Yogart

Get Creative with Your Meals

Build a Salad: Spanish, Steamed veggies, grilled chicken, corn, beans

Mix and Match: Combine different dishes to meet your nutrition goals

- UGA Dining Halls like Bolton and O-House offfer “Choose-Your-Own and Salad Bars” and heart-healthy meal options

Final Reminders

- Balance, not perfection. No food is “bad” - it’s about eating everything in moderation.
- Eat intentionally, not perfectly. Build habits that fuel your body and fit your lifestyle.

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CHAPTER 3

Hydration Habits

Caffeine and Energy Drinks

Balancing Social Life and Nutrition

HYDRATION HABITS

HYDRATION

Staying hydrated is important! Making sure you are drinking enough water is critical to keeping your body healthy!

RECOMMENDED DAILY INTAKE OF WATER

For *college-aged men*, it is recommended you drink 15.5 cups of water a day.[3]

For college-aged women, it is recommended you drink 11.5 cups of water a day.[3]

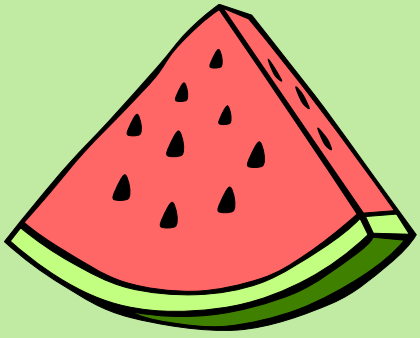
HYDRATION HABITS

WHAT OTHER FOODS CONTAINS WATER?

Other fruits, veggies, and beverages contains percentages of water. It is still advised that you drink the recommended amount of water, but these foods can help you stay hydrated!

Lettuce can contain up to 98% of water! This is a great source of water intake. Lettuce can be eaten with a salad or on a sandwich![2]

Cucumbers contain nearly 96% water! Cucumbers can be a quick snack with a dip such as ranch, or implemented into a meal.[2]



Watermelon is a great summer snack. It contains close to 92% water! Watermelon is refreshing and can help keep you hydrated on hot summer days.[2]

CAFFEINE AND ENERGY DRINKS

WHAT IS CAFFEINE?

Caffeine is a natural stimulant that is found in coffee, tea, soft drinks, and energy drinks. Caffeine is derived from cacao plants, coffee beans, tea leaves, and many other natural sources. This supplement is used to stimulate your nervous system to stay awake and prevent tiredness.[8]

WHO DRINKS CAFFEINE?

80% of the world's population consumes a caffeinated beverage each day, and this number jumps to 90% for North American adults.

Caffeine is consumed by 92% of college students, with coffee being the main source.[5]

WHY DO WE DRINK CAFFEINE?

There are multiple reasons college students drink caffeine. A study was conducted asking college students what makes them drink caffeine; 79% of students reported they liked the taste, 68% reported they just liked the taste of it (coffee), and 39% of students use it for concentration.[5]

CAFFEINE AND ENERGY DRINKS

What is the recommended daily intake of caffeine?

Recommended Daily Intake of caffeine

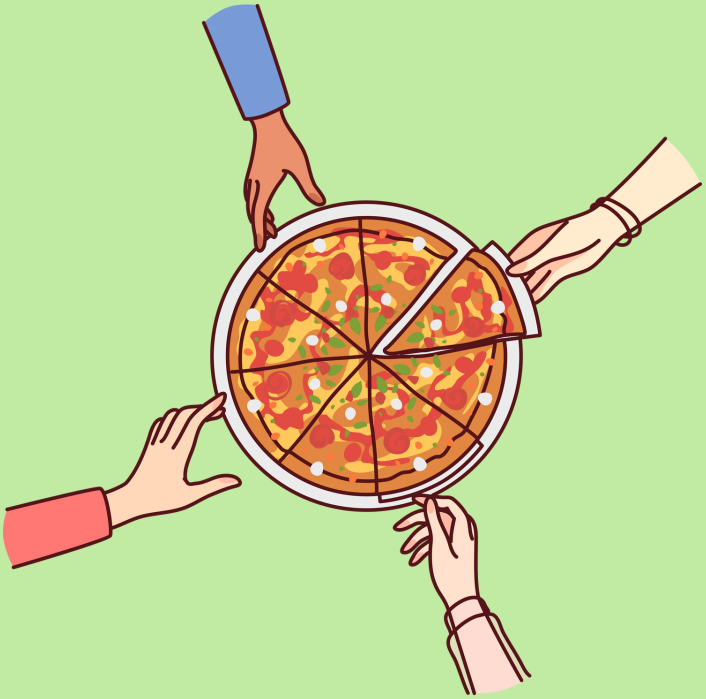
The recommended daily intake of caffeine is 400 milligrams. Some companies do not disclose their caffeine percentages in the nutrition label, so you may have to check their website or other places in the product packaging.[6]

This is a nutrition label from an energy drink, the caffeine percentage is not posted on the nutrition facts portion of the can. It is important that you know how much caffeine you are ingesting so that you do not go over the recommended daily amount. Going over this amount could result in health issues with your heart and liver.[6]

BALANCING SOCIAL LIFE AND NUTRITION

How can you balance social life and nutrition?

Balancing social life and nutrition can be a hard task. College-aged students tend to have a busy academic and social life, making time for nutritious meals feel like a burden.[7]



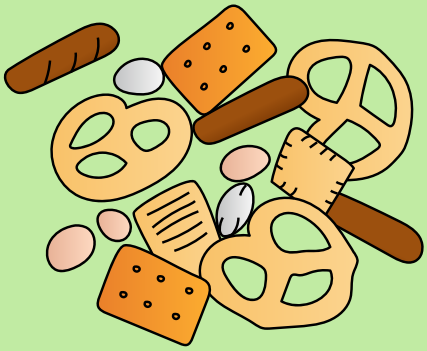
While juggling school, work, and social life you may find yourself eating out at restaurants or skipping meals. Having a balanced diet can help your energy levels and overall mood, which can determine how you perform on assignments and your mood towards family and friends.[7]

BALANCING SOCIAL LIFE AND NUTRITION

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO BALANCE YOUR MEALS AND SOCIAL LIFE?

Meal prepping is a great way to plan out healthy and nutritious meals while having busy weeks. Picking a meal with veggies, a protein, carbs, and healthy fats you can prepare ahead of time will cut down on cooking when you dont feel motivated to do so.[4]

Making plans ahead of time to hangout with friends and family and eat a meal together can help you planning your meals and not being wasteful. Skipping a meal you prepped one night a week to go and socialize is normal![1]



Eating small snacks through the day can help curb your hunger while eating out and will cause you to not overeat. This can make you feel sick and interrupt your digestive tract.[1]

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CHAPTER 4

SUPPLEMENTS

NUTRITION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

SUPPLEMENTS

Common Deficiencies in College Students

College students often face nutritional gaps due to busy class schedules, financial restraints, and inadequate eating habits. The most common nutrient deficiencies in this age group include vitamin D, iron, vitamin B12, and Omega-3s.

Vitamin D: Important for bone health and immune functioning, often low due to dietary intake or little sun exposure.

Iron: Essential for energy and oxygen transport throughout the body, often low among menstruating students and those following vegetarian/vegan diets.

Vitamin B12: Vital for energy production and nerve function, often low in students who avoid consuming animal products.

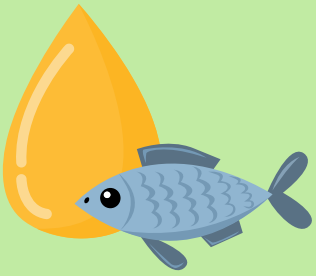
Omega-3s: Supports brain health and focus, often low in typical student diets that are low in fatty fish, nuts, seeds, and oils.

SUPPLEMENTS

Do you need supplements?

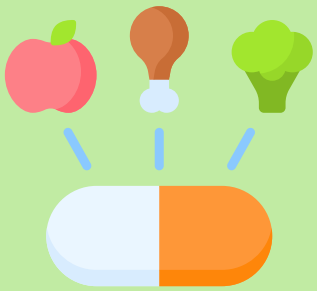
Supplements can help fill certain nutritional gaps, but they aren't always necessary for individuals. Even with the most balanced diet, factors such as stress, dietary restrictions, and limited food options can make it more difficult to meet nutritional needs. Before starting any supplement, it's best to check with a healthcare provider who can recommend more appropriate, personalized options for you!

Go-To Supplements for Students



Omega 3s- found in fish oil or algae-based supplements, Omega-3s help with focus, cognitive function, and mental well-being.

Multivitamins- can act as "nutritional insurance"; cover small gaps in the diet. These typically include vitamins like A, C, D, E, and K, and minerals such as iron and zinc.

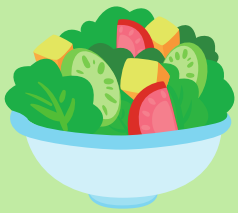


NUTRITION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Best Brain Foods

What you eat directly impacts cognitive function. Certain foods are especially powerful for supporting focus, memory, clarity, and academic performance.

Whole grains (like brown rice, oats, and whole wheat bread) provide steady energy for study sessions.



Leafy greens (like spinach and romaine lettuce) are rich in nutrients that can enhance brain functioning.

Berries (blueberries, strawberries, blackberries) contain powerful antioxidants that reduce brain fatigue.

Fish (like salmon and tuna) and **nuts** (like walnuts and almonds) provide healthy fats and Vitamin E, which support mental clarity and sharpness.

NUTRITION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Snacking Smart

What you eat while studying or taking exams can make a huge difference. Aim for balanced snacks that combine protein, fiber, and healthy fats to maintain a steady level of energy.

Apple slices with peanut butter

Trail mix with nuts and dark chocolate

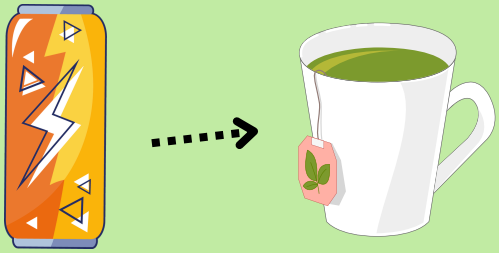
Whole-grain crackers with hummus

Greek yogurt with berries and chia seeds

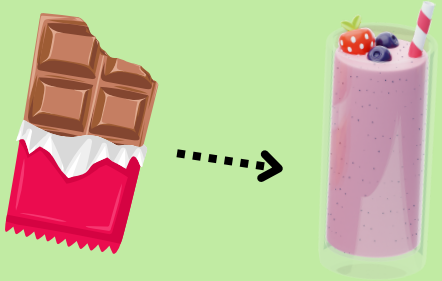
NUTRITION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Avoiding the Crash

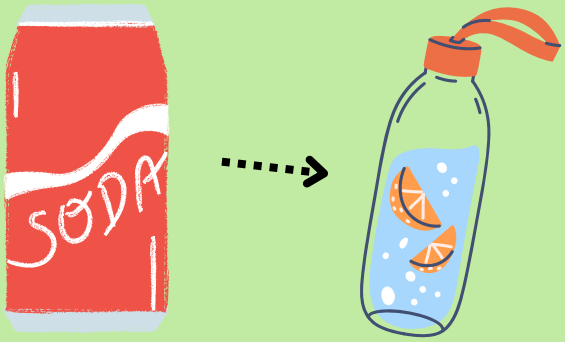
While studying, it's super tempting to reach for energy drinks and sugary snacks, but they often lead to a spike in energy that ends in a crash. Instead, try these smart swaps for more effective energy:



Swap: energy drinks
Replace with: green tea



Swap: candy bars
Replace with: a smoothie with fruit



Swap: sugary soda
Replace with: sparkling/infused water

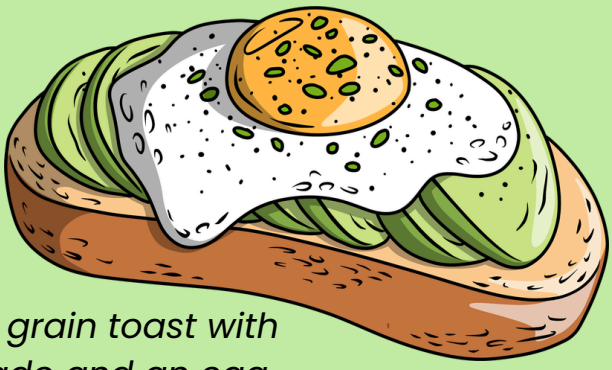
NUTRITION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Breakfast Matters!

Skipping breakfast can leave you feeling unfocused and unenergized. A balanced breakfast sets the tone for better metabolism and concentration throughout the entire day.

Good Options:

Oatmeal with fruit and nuts



Whole grain toast with avocado and an egg

A smoothie with spinach, banana, and protein powder

SUMMARY

NUTRITION BASICS: QUICK GUIDE FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

- Balance macronutrients (carbs, fats, proteins) and make sure you're getting enough micronutrients (vitamins, minerals) for energy and well-being.
- Read food labels to recognize portion sizes, hidden ingredients, and added sugars.
- Plan meals on a budget with staples like beans, eggs, rice, and frozen vegetables.
- In the dining hall, watch portions and try to choose grilled over fried foods.
- Pick one day a week to cook a batch of a nutritious, simple meal for the days ahead.
- Stay hydrated by aiming for either 15 (men) or 11 (women) cups of water per day, and skipping caffeine.
- Take supplements (if necessary) to replenish common micronutrient needs (such as vitamin D or iron).
- Eat whole grains, leafy greens, berries, nuts and fish to boost brain power.

SNACK SMART, STAY HYDRATED, AND ALWAYS EAT BREAKFAST!

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