

Grade “A” Food

As a current college student, I have experienced the peanut butter and jelly elementary years, the questionable meat middle school years, as well as the pizza party days of high school. As time was spent horse playing, flirting, or studying, I seldom thought about the food I consumed. I am a college student now and not much has changed. A typical day may consist of a thermos full of Maxwell Instant coffee, a can of chicken soup, a bag of potato chips, and frozen TV dinners which are sometimes replaced with chocolate chip pancakes. In retrospect, I am aware of my diet’s lack of nutrition but in the moment of studying, nothing seems as important as learning to balance chemical equations for the upcoming exam. Exhausted from the day’s work, I come home to my healthy-choice roommate feeding me useless nutritional information as I feed on a bag of buttered popcorn once again. “You know, you should really consider replacing that with some low-fat yogurt,” she preaches as I munch, “It may sound crazy, but yogurt really helps me focus.” Too preoccupied with thoughts of sleep, the affects of food on studying has never really occurred to me until now. Will my stress over school gradually disappear if I switch over to the light side? Studies have been conducted in order to see if there is indeed a relationship between diet quality and optimum performance. Certainly, this “optimum performance” could definitely come in handy for my exam.

There is an infinite amount of ways to perform. Some people prefer going to the gym on their spare time, others enjoy painting, playing sports, reading books, talking to others, or

even study for exams. The energy found in food enables the brain to function which, essentially, allows us to carry out our daily activities. In short, nutrients from the food enters our body and is broken down into smaller parts by our organs which are broken down even further so that our cells can feed off of them (Kahn). We give energy to our cells via food and the giving is then reciprocated when our cells function efficiently, enabling us to perform. Students such as me are especially hungry for this energy during finals week. This is because it is imperative that we spend as much time as we physically can on learning our subject material in order to get a good grade. The checklist of materials for that week is a simple list consisting of the three essentials; energy drinks, sugary snacks, and books. I find that the concept of getting energy from food is easy to grasp; just eat and voila! Unfortunately it's not that simple. Foods range in the glycaemic index (GI) which ranks the structure of energy yielding carbohydrates, or sugars, in food (Canning). But if sugar is still sugar, why would it matter how they are structured? Foods range from simple sugars to complex carbohydrates and affect our blood glucose levels differently. Simple sugars such as white flour or most processed foods tend to give short bursts of energy whereas complex carbohydrates such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables release it more slowly (Canning). This could be due to the fact that it takes longer to break down the complex arrangements. With that being said, a Red Bull, Snicker bar, and a bag of Cheetos would give me just two hours before I'm face down, cheek in book. But if I wanted to buy more time, I should go with the apple, carrots, and cup of tea combination instead.

Formulas for finding the area of a circle, measure of a triangle's angle, and the amount of ounces in a ton seem to be hardly used in everyday life. Putting more emphasis on learning

the dates of each American civil war battle rather than the battle itself is unnecessary. Even if these concepts are personally irrelevant, they still must be known in order to pass the class. When we are born our brains begin to soak up information from the environment by making connections between neuron fibers (Consumer's Medical Journal). As we go through various learning processes, we can add on to these connections to make them stronger. Thus, more brain power makes memorizing formulas and dates possible. . So, what is the deal with my roommate's claim that her low-fat yogurt helps her focus? According to nutritionist Catherine Saxelby, diet *can* make a difference when preparing for exams. She states that "smart nutrients" such as folate affects the synthesis of neurotransmitters which are important in making neural connections. Choosing to snack on a juicy fruit can also prove to be beneficial. For example, an orange (also rich in folate) helps lower levels of an amino acid associated with memory loss (M.D). Research also shows that black beans contain a nutrient that aids in synthesizing the acetylcholine neurotransmitter, which is "crucial for memory," (M.D.). Gain topnotch memory performance simply from eating the right foods. Think of the bundle one could save on flash cards alone!

Every college student should know what to expect when entering their first year. Of all the do's and don'ts the most important would have to be not to cut class. Right from the start, I realized that my skipping days were over. I promised myself that I would do my best to attend every lecture once I heard that it was one of the more common reasons students get bad grades. I do, however recall a time when I got sick and was prescribed to stay home for two weeks. I missed many chapter discussions, a couple quizzes, and pages of lecture notes. Even with a valid statement of illness signed by a doctor, late work and make ups are

unacceptable, leaving sick notes signed from mom out of the question. This didn't seem at all fair since getting sick was beyond my control. Or was it? According to a Children's Lifestyle and School-performance study, an assessment of academic performance revealed that a decrease in attendance is highest amongst undernourished children (Florence). This suggests that my refined sugar diet was the cause of my absence which was influenced by my bad judgment. No form of documentation could excuse that. The study concluded that consuming a variety of nutrient dense foods and getting the recommended daily servings was important in order to prevent micronutrient deficiencies and other health problems that may interfere with performance. Of all the do's and don'ts, I'd say that a healthy diet is making its way to the top of the list.

I usually thought of myself as a terrible test taker. No matter how much I felt prepared for exams, the rush of nerves never seemed to escape me. Eager to fix my problem, I found myself borrowing exam rituals other students do in order to relieve their anxiety. I've tried everything from taking deep breaths to stretch breaks, to even chewing fruity gum; none of which have been successful in stimulating my confidence. Eating the right foods, however, is not as discriminate. Evidence shows that, for anyone, certain nutrients can improve the brain cell function which promotes the flow of good mood neurotransmitters such as serotonin (Saxelby). Of these "smart nutrients", omega-3 fatty acids found in seafood and nuts improve circulation of the brain. Because of this more serotonin is dispersed, thus improving mood. The new and improved exam ritual; eat a handful of walnuts and pecans.

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