

Eating Strategies for Exam-Time



If you are like most students, exam-time eating often sends you into a de-energizing spiral. Your nutrition becomes a nightmare as you take in your quota of 'junk' food during midterms and finals. Getting control of your eating during these stressful times is possible. Read on for some helpful hints to overcome these nutritional pitfalls.

Nutrition tips to keep you alert while studying

Eat small, frequent meals to keep your blood sugar and energy levels steady.



Now's the time to have easy, convenient meal-type foods on hand. Avoid living entirely on snack foods as they usually won't energize you as much as a real meal. This is the time for frozen entrees, bean soups, peanut butter and cold cut sandwiches, ready- to-eat tuna and chicken salads and other convenient foods.

Avoid sweets and sugary foods. If you crave sweets, consider a high protein nutrition bar instead of a candy bar. Choose one that has 15 grams of protein, such as Balance Bar[®], Ironman PR[®] or any that says "40-30-30"* on the label. Read the "nutrition facts" label carefully.



Choose meals and snacks that emphasize protein over carbohydrate. Protein-rich meals and snacks keep your energy on an even keel. For example, snack on cheese, crackers and skim milk instead of crackers and juice. Top your pasta with grilled chicken strips rather than have pasta and sauce alone. You can even scramble some eggs!

Limit caffeine. Cut back gradually.



Water, water, water! Keep a cup and a liter of ice water at your desk to help maintain your energy. Consume at least that amount of water for every two hours of studying.

Avoiding extra, exam-time calories

Make yourself get up to snack. Don't bring the snacks to your study place. Eat snacks in the kitchen or another part of your room, away from the desk.



Make sure your room/apartment is stocked with healthier snacks. Here are some ideas: nuts, raisins, cheese sticks, low-fat yogurt, low-fat cottage cheese, low-fat milk, crunchy fresh fruits and veggies (add dip for the veggies), frozen juice bars, hearty, low sugar breakfast cereals, oatmeal, low-fat popcorn, protein-rich nutrition bars, caffeine-free herbal teas, etc.

Remember that thirst can be confused with hunger. Try drinking a glass of water or a cup of hot herbal tea if you are unsure of the origins of your hunger.

Use non-food stress busters to cope with the tensions of exam time, instead of eating. (See 'Stress Busters for Students: Avoiding the Food Trap' for Ideas)

Study breaks: are you hungry?



Only eat when you are physically hungry, not because you are in need of a study break! When heading for the pantry look for true hunger signals, like stomach pangs/twinges, to be sure you're physically hungry. If you're not hungry but still desire to eat, take a 10-minute time out and try to figure out what you really need (i.e. study break, stress relief, pep talk, etc.). Try to get those needs met without using food. Do something physical to get the blood circulating to the brain.

Don't watch TV for a study break. The commercials for food will send you to the pantry for calories you don't need!

*40-30-30 means the bar is 40% carbohydrates, 30% protein and 30% fat