



Nutritionist's Corner Current Article



College Eating 101: **Choosing Wisely**

In my past three years here at Dartmouth College I have met many students through outreach programs and individual sessions and one of the questions that comes up most frequently is: ***How do I eat healthy at college?***

My belief is that "all foods can fit" into a healthy and fit lifestyle, but you must CHOOSE WISELY.

Eating at college can be a challenging experience. For some, this is the first time selecting food without guidance from a family member or other adult. For others, the experience can be difficult because it requires adjusting to new foods, new schedules, and new surroundings. It is no surprise that some first-year students leave to return home in June plus or minus a few pounds on their bodies. For those who add body weight, this may be a very normal and appropriate part of their physiological development into adulthood. For some it is the result of feeling overwhelmed by the choices available to them and the excitement of trying "a little of everything".

For those students who have a difficult time deciding what to choose, the first reassurance is that: menus run on a cycle. In the case of Dartmouth College Dining Service, most cycles are 3 weeks long. Each term a new cycle begins and new recipes are added while old ones are removed to provide variety, balance, and appeal for the season. Therefore, when you see different choices that appeal at a given meal, realize that you will see these choices again, and will have an opportunity to make other choices.

When you arrive at a dining hall, first decide "How hungry am I?" Sometimes we eat for reasons besides hunger, i.e. social time, visual appeal, boredom, etc. Decide how hungry you are and make choices based on that level of hunger.

S-L-O-W---D-O-W-N your meal. In our busy lives we are often in a rush to eat and move on to the next thing. Attempt to make eating a separate activity from anything else (except for maybe socializing). It's important for your mind/body to realize that you are eating. By slowing down the rate at which you eat and allowing for 20-30 minutes to pass, you are allowing your body to tell you when it's full. When you begin to feel full, stop eating, even if you might have some food left behind.

TIPS for CHOOSING WISELY

1. Decide "**How hungry am I**"? Choose accordingly, even if your friends are eating more. It's OK to eat less if you are not really hungry. There will always be an opportunity to eat more later.
2. **S-L-O-W---D-O-W-N** your rate of eating. Allow time for your mind/body to decide when you have had enough. Try to make eating a separate activity from anything else, so you don't miss your body's cue to stop eating. Try to allow 20-30 minutes to finish a meal. Some examples of slowing down: Putting your fork down between bites, Eating ½ and then stopping for a 5-10 minute break before continuing, Drinking water between bites.
3. **Balance.** Try to choose at least 1 serving of at least 3 of the 5 food groups at each meal, i.e. egg, toast, fruit
4. Variety. **Vary color and texture** of your food selections. The more varied items you consume, the more varied nutrients you'll ingest, providing more balance in the long run.
5. Choose **nutrient dense foods** as often as possible, i.e. whole grains, fruits and vegetables, lean proteins
6. Choose foods that are **>3 grams of fiber per serving**. These foods are generally whole grain or natural fruits or vegetables. They provide the beneficial components of soluble and insoluble fiber while helping to keep you feeling full longer. Your fiber goal is >25 grams per day.
7. Consume at least **2 servings of calcium-rich foods** each day for adequate bone development and general health. 3 servings if you

are female.

8. **Watch for eating triggers**, i.e. boredom, stress, emotions, distraction, etc. If you are going to have a snack, prepare a serving of something and serve it to yourself on a plate/bowl or in a cup. An open box of cereal is *not* a serving. Take time to make the eating experience a separate event from studying. If you decide not to snack, then make a list of activities that would better suit your needs, i.e. taking a walk, calling a friend, writing a letter, changing the environment.

9. Eating healthy should be one important part of your life here at Dartmouth College, but it should not dominate your thoughts. If you find yourself thinking about food or exercise more often than you would like, get support from EDPA's and/or professionals on campus who can help.

If there is an issue you would like discussed in the next Nutrition Web Article or for more information, or to make an appointment to talk with Claudette Peck, College Nutritionist - Please call (603) 650-1442.