

Exploring Nutrition Handout

What is Eating?

- Taking something in through the mouth as food: ingesting, chewing, and swallowing
- Think of eating like putting fuel in a car – Your body needs fuel for energy.
- What do you think “Grow Foods” are?
- What do you think “Fun Foods” are?
- What does eating mean to you?

Why Is Nutrition Important?

- Your mood, behavior and brain function are affected by what you eat.
- When hungry, you may feel irritable and restless.
- When full, you may feel calm and satisfied.
- If you eat less food or more food than you need over a long period of time, it can affect your physical and mental health.

Discussion

- What are you like when you are hungry?
- How do you feel when you haven’t eaten all day?
- How do you feel when you are full?
- How do you feel when you overeat?
- It is helpful to be very aware of your body’s hunger and fullness. Listen to those body cues - It can help keep you at a healthy weight, and keep your mood more stable.

Effects of Poor Nutrition

- Thinking is less clear, and you may feel:
- Irritable, unable to focus, with decreased ability to listen or understand
- Cold, tired, low on energy
- Distressed by nausea or headaches
- Unable to function as well in school or work, or unable to keep up - (The brain of a child or teen with an eating disorder may not develop as it should)
- When nutrition is poor, you tend to get sick easier

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Nutrition Helps Your Brain

- Your brain needs a lot of nutrition and energy to keep brain chemicals and nerves functioning well.
- Those neurotransmitters influence mood, sleep patterns and thinking.
- If you don't have enough vitamins or minerals, there can be damage to nerves in the brain that affect memory, limit problem-solving ability, and brain function.

Nutrition Gives You Energy

- Energy “calories” come from the carbohydrate, protein and fat found in foods and beverages.
- The human brain is very active and uses about 20 – 30% of a person's energy intake at rest.
- When the calories eaten don't meet the energy needed, there will be changes in how your brain functions, when under- nourished.
- That's why skipping breakfast is an unhealthy habit.

Nutrition Helps Your Body

- When you are hungry, your body has less energy and motivation.
- The body responds to long-term hunger by shutting down or slowing down some of the body's function, changing activity levels, hormones, oxygen and how the nutrients get to your body's cells.
- Low energy can make it harder to fight infection.

Optional Learning Activity

- Ask a volunteer to write their usual daily eating routine on the white board and discuss healthy or unhealthy habits, making suggestions for the diet on the board.
- Offer a Daily Food Chart if group members want to keep track of their own nutrition after group (recommend discussing it later with their nurse or dietician) <http://www.projectparticipate.org/Handouts/FoodChecklist.PDF>
- Ask yourself, are you eating balanced meals?

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Harvard Food Pyramid (Use Healthy Eating Pyramid handout or websites below.)

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See further description of the Healthy Eating Pyramid at

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/pyramid/index.html>

From http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/12/Harvard_food_pyramid.png

Tips for Healthy Eating

- Start with activity and movement.
- Eat plant-based foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains and healthy oils.
- Cut down on red meats, refined grains, potatoes, sugary drinks or baked goods, and salty or processed foods – Eat healthier foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grain breads and pasta, fish and poultry.
- Take a multivitamin if recommended by your healthcare provider.
- Use alcohol only in moderation.
- Be mindful – Focus on physical signs of hunger and fullness.

Discussion: Why Should You Focus on Diet and Nutrition?

- Awareness can help you make and maintain changes in your eating habits.
- Education may be needed if a person needs a special diet or to avoid food interactions with drugs (For example, limiting caffeine because of medications).
- Awareness can lead to help for people with eating disorders or chemical dependencies.
- Support can be helpful if the medication used to treat psychiatric illness can cause weight gain or loss.

Why Do People Eat When They Are Not Hungry?

- When they are bored or tired
- When situations or moods “trigger” going to food for comfort
- Emotional eating can lead to obesity or poor health from unhealthy food choices - Seeking counseling may be helpful.

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What Is Emotional Eating?

- Eating for comfort, or in response to emotions, rather than for hunger
- There are some skills you can learn to decrease the emotional “pull” of food. (See Emotional Eating Handout.)
- Moods, stress, and related “triggers” include feeling a loss of control or vague feelings of anxiety.
- Negative emotions can lead to eating too much (as with binge eating disorder).
- Sometimes anxiety and depression can lead to poor appetite and not eating enough - Nutrition supplements may be needed.

Recognize Your “Triggers”

- Situations or relationships can cause stress and anxiety that “triggers” thoughts and behaviors of emotional eating.
- Avoiding the triggers during recovery can be helpful, but that is not always possible.
- Finding support and using coping and relaxation skills can be helpful for the times when anxiety increases.
- What “triggers” do you have for unhealthy eating behaviors?
- What could be done to avoid them or to cope with them?

Discuss Mindful Eating - Refer to page 2 of Emotional Eating Handout

Make Healthier Food Choices

- Make small, slow changes instead of trying to make large, fast changes.
- Keep track of what you eat and drink each day, so you can tell which food groups you need to eat more of.
- Consider asking for help from a dietician, especially if you have an illness or problem that needs a special diet.
- Check with your health care provider before following a new diet or exercise program.
- Eat a variety of foods for meals and snacks.

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Choose to Make One of These Changes:

- Instead of frying meat, try baking, grilling or broiling. Take the skin off before eating chicken or turkey.
- Eat grilled, broiled or baked fish at least once a week.
- Use low or nonfat versions of butter, sour cream, mayonnaise or salad dressings.
- Eat fruits and vegetables with each meal and as snacks.
- Watch out for “hidden” fats, especially when going out to eat.
- Drink more water. Use small amounts of unsweetened tea or diet soda pop instead of sugary drinks.
- Walk more - Get more activity and exercise.

Discussion:

How can you make sure to eat breakfast in the morning?

Name a healthy food that you don't get enough of. How can you eat more?

How can you cut back on regular soda and juice to help control weight?

Name something healthy you could order for fast food.

Name a new food you have tried recently. How did you like it?

How can I eat healthier to improve my health?

What is one thing I can do to improve my eating habits.

What does healthy eating mean to you?

Other References:

Fundukian, L.J. & Wilson, J. (2007). Gale Encyclopedia of Mental Health. 2nd ed. p. 785-791.

Discussion Questions adapted from information provided by Spring Harbor Hospital in Westbrook, Maine. (2006).