

Exploring Nutrition Icebreakers Discussion Guide

Why is your 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

What is your favorite snack? How important are snacks to you?

- You need a variety of foods for good nutrition. Snacking between meals is a good time to have fruit or something healthy to give you energy until the next mealtime.

What is your favorite meal to cook? Why?

- There is no right or wrong answer here, but it may be good to mention how food can be linked to emotions and comfort (see Emotional Eating handout).

How do you feel if you don't eat all day?

- When energy levels stay low, people tend to feel tired, sad, and hopeless
- 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, headaches, or feel sick
 - Unable to function as well in school or work, or unable to keep up

How do you feel if you overeat?

- You probably feel sluggish and uncomfortable after overeating. Brain chemicals released after over-eating can cause sleepiness, but sometimes they cause hyperactivity in children

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- 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.

How do you feel if you drink a pot of coffee?

- Nervous, restless, irritable, unable to sleep,
- Stomach upset, fast heartbeat, muscle tremors
- Caffeine can interact with your medication, and make anxiety disorders or psychosis worse. It is recommended that you do not use much caffeine
- Use caffeine "to help and not hurt" – Nutrition can't be replaced by drinking caffeine

Why should we eat in the morning or within 2-3 hours after waking?

- If you go to bed at night to sleep and wake up in the morning, you have been "fasting" for several hours. Breakfast is "breaking the fast"
- Eating breakfast is important to give your body some "fuel" to start the day
- Your alertness and awareness will be better if you have good nutrition, and you will be able to concentrate better.
- Poor appetite is often a sign of illness. But, by eating 3 balanced meals and healthy snacks, your mood can be more stable and the right medication adjustments can be made by your doctor.

How do you know if your blood sugar is low?

- Sometimes we have signs of hunger, but we don't feel hungry. Don't "override the physical hunger, even if it may seem to go away after a while. Your body shuts down to lower metabolism in "conservation mode" if we ignore hunger and our blood sugar is low.
- It is best not to skip meals, because your brain needs a steady supply of sugar. If glucose (blood sugar) gets too low, it can cause
 - Anxiety, irritability, confusion, headache
 - Double vision or blurred vision
 - Trembling or shaking, sweating, clammy skin, feelings of weakness and/or hunger

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Does what you eat affect your mood? If so, how?

- Regular meals help stabilize mood and keep blood sugar steady. The brain needs nourishment just as your body needs food as fuel. Protein is needed to make the brain chemicals (neurotransmitters) work as they should.
- There are 8 essential amino acids supplied by eating protein, but the rest can be made by the human body
- When high quality protein foods are not available, people can have low mood and poor brain functioning, and may include sadness, anger or aggression

How does alcohol affect nutrition and mood?

- High alcohol intake can disrupt your sleep patterns and affect your mood
- Alcoholism is a common cause of poor nutrition because alcoholic beverages provide energy but not vitamins or minerals
- In fact, certain vitamins are needed to break down alcohol in the body, causing nutrients to be even lower
- To stay healthy, a person should have a balanced diet, eating meals and snacks often

Conclusion

- Awareness can help you make and maintain changes in your eating habits.
- Counseling may be needed for people with eating disorders or chemical dependencies.
- Nutritional support can be helpful if the medication used to treat an illness can cause weight gain or loss.
- Poor nutrition can cause low energy and a slower recovery.