

Food facts

Today's diet affects tomorrow's body

By Wade See

Food. It's a word that perks our heads and usually sets our stomach to growling. It's what dictates whether you buy a two-piece or a one-piece swimsuit, and it can have an influence on how well you do in school and whether or not you get through the semester without a trip to A.P. Beutel Health Center.

According to Dr. Joanne Lupton, assistant professor of nutrition, what you eat can affect how well you do in school. Although she says there is not a direct one to one correlation, nutrition can affect your health and, ultimately, how well you are able to study.

"On the average, (this) is a very health conscious campus in terms of both diet and exercise. People want to eat the right things, but they don't always know what the right things are," Lupton says.

Lupton teaches a basic nutrition course in which she has students keep a three day record of everything they eat. She says it's harder for women to keep up their proper nutrient levels than it is for men. She explains that, while men can eat a lot of food and satisfy much of their Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA), women must eat fewer calories to avoid gaining weight and therefore must be more careful about selecting foods high in essential vitamins, minerals and proteins.

Lupton says that according to the three-day meal analysis she conducts in her nutrition class, 80 percent of the females did not meet the RDA for iron.

Dr. John Moore, acting director of the health center, says a lack of iron can lead to iron deficiency anemia. This condition, he says, can make a person tired and lethargic.

As a result of iron deficiency, some students may be more tired and have a harder time studying than if their iron was at its proper level.

Lupton says that female students also tend to have calcium deficiencies, and that males have problems getting enough vitamin A and vitamin C. The females tend to cut dairy products from their diet in an effort to reduce their fat intake, Lupton says. The problem with that, she says, is that they miss their calcium. Instead, people should use low-fat dairy products such as skim milk to get their RDA of calcium, she says. A calcium deficiency may not show up as a problem in young students immediately, she says, but what they eat now can affect their health when they are in their 40s or 50s.

"Don't just think of today, think of the future," Lupton says.

She says students now in their late teens and early 20s think they are on top of the world and don't worry

much about their health. She warns, however, that what you eat today may make a difference in how you feel tomorrow.

Lupton says the men in her class tend to be low on vitamin A and vitamin C. Both of these vitamins come from vegetables and juices which men tend to pass over. She says it only takes one glass of orange juice a day to meet the RDA for vitamin C, and just one carrot a day will satisfy the RDA for vitamin A.

subtle problems of a nutrient deficiency, many more complain of being stricken with the "freshman 15," a sudden weight gain upon entering college. Lupton explains that the fast-fat phenomenon is due to small changes in lifestyle when a person moves from home to school. She says that something as simple as changing from skim milk at home to whole milk at school will cause a person to gain as much as 12 pounds in one year, provided everything else

Dr. Moore warns that gaining too much weight can be dangerous.

"Obesity is a very serious health hazard," Dr. Moore says. "It can be a substantial causal factor in cardiovascular disease."

It also causes hardening of the arteries and a type of diabetes, he says. With this type of diabetes, the greater the weight, the worse the disease tends to be.

Fortunately, neither improper nutrition nor obesity have to be part of life at Texas A&M if a person makes the effort to eat right. Lupton says that nutritious and non-fattening meals can be found at both the on-campus dining centers as well as at fast-food restaurants around town.

"You can eat a very nutritious meal anywhere on campus if you use your head and choose your meals carefully. You've gotta be selective," Lupton says.

She tells her students not to necessarily give up the foods they like, but rather to eat them in moderation.

John Jackson, Sbisa menu board member, says the dining halls on campus have adopted a trend toward healthy foods. He says the student menu board has almost total control of what they serve, and healthy foods are "the new thrust of the whole menu board."

Jackson says that since the new thrust toward health-conscious eating, the on-campus dining centers have decreased their use of salt in the kitchen by 25 percent, added a "lite line" at Sbisa, added vegetable bars with both seasoned and unseasoned vegetables, and begun using polyunsaturated oils in all their fried food except for french fries.

Jackson also works on the "Ask Sbisa" bulletin board located just before the exit at Sbisa. "Ask Sbisa" is a suggestion box where students can turn in their comments, complaints and suggestions. Some of the comments get put on the bulletin board, and all of the notes on the board get a reply. Jackson says that, while he can't put all of the suggestions up on the board, every suggestion gets taken to the monthly menu board meetings.

The meetings, he says, are at 6:30 in the morning. There, while their taste buds are still asleep, they sample foods recommended by the cafeteria managers, dietitians, and suppliers. They decide whether or not to put an item on the menu by majority vote of the students only. Other input to menu planning comes from the managers of each dining center.

While they don't have a vote at the board meetings, Col. James Moore, assistant director for board food service, says the managers ask students to sample foods and comment about their quality every

Open wide

Last year on-campus diners consumed literally tons of food. Below is a sampling to whet your appetite.

Food Type	Amount Consumed
Hamburger patties	122,000 pounds
Baked chicken	6,720 pounds
French fries	292,000 pounds
Captain Crunch cereal	5,390 pounds
Granola cereal	5,327 pounds
Shredded wheat cereal	2,500 pounds
Crispy Wheats and Raisins cereal	2,400 pounds
Cakes	9,114 pounds
Bananas	114,000
Whole cantelopes	44,000
Oranges	109,000
Whole watermelons	7,000
Apples	108,000
Grapefruits	44,500
Lettuce	221,400
Coca-Cola	12,485 gallons
Orange juice	6,000 gallons

List compiled by Col. James Moore

Dr. Moore says that not only can what you eat today make a difference in your health later in life, it can have an effect on how well your immune system functions today. Many vitamins and minerals such as zinc, manganese, vitamin C, the B complexes, and vitamin A have been shown to play a role in the function of the immune system. He says poor nutrition is not often the direct cause of illness for A&M students, but poor nutrition has an indirect effect on health and disease resistance that is difficult to measure. In other words, students who don't eat right aren't necessarily doomed to illness, but those who do eat right have a better chance of avoiding problems.

Much of the recent focus on food and health has been on the anti-cancer effect of high fiber foods, Dr. Moore says. Foods that are high in fiber, such as bran, have been shown to help prevent colon cancers, Dr. Moore says.

While many people suffer from the

stays the same. But usually other things don't stay the same. Despite the fact that most of them are younger than 21, many freshmen add beer as a regular item on their diets. Plus, many of the hours spent roaming the malls or playing athlete are converted to sitting at a desk pouring over some nasty homework problem. This all translates to an excess of calories and eventually, the infamous freshman 15.

Lupton says that every 3,500 extra calories that the body doesn't need get converted into one pound of fat. That means to gain 15 pounds in one year, a person need only eat 143 extra calories a day. A cookie, or a coke, or one, just one, beer will give you your daily allowance for the freshman 15.

Luckily, the same works in reverse. If you can cut out just 143 extra calories a day from your diet, that's just one cookie, one coke, or...naw.

If you have gone above and beyond the freshman 15, however, you may be putting yourself in danger of serious health problems.