**What to eat before an exam**

**Nutrition tips to support your brain during tests**

Did you know that what you eat and drink can affect your exam performance? What is the best diet to follow on exam day? Can food and drink affect your test scores? In our increasingly health-conscious world, parents and students are seeking the answers to these important questions. We all hope that healthy pre-exam nutrition will give us an added edge during exam time, and in fact, it can.

A long exam is like a mental marathon in which endurance is critical. Nutritionists emphasize the importance of healthy eating habits at this stressful time. They say the right food and drink can energize your system, improve your alertness and sustain you through the long exam hours. The wrong dietary choices can make you feel sluggish, jittery, or burned out. The following nutrition tips will help you perform at your best on exam day.

**1. Make sure to eat** Even if you normally skip breakfast or avoid eating when you are nervous, you should still make the time to eat something. Very simply, your brain needs the energy from food to work efficiently. You need to keep your mental focus on your exam and not on your hunger. It would be a shame to study intensively before your exam and then be too fatigued physically to do your best on exam day. If you really cannot stomach food, then try having a protein shake or smoothie.

**2. Eat brain-boosting food.** This includes protein-rich foods which can lead to greater mental alertness. Healthy food choices on exam day include eggs, nuts, yogurt, and cottage cheese. Good breakfast combinations might be whole-grain cereal with low-fat milk, eggs and toast with jam, porridge, oatmeal, or sugar-free muesli.

Other dietary choices considered to be brain foods are fish, walnuts, blueberries, sunflower seeds, flaxseed, dried fruits, figs, and prunes.

Although unproven, many consider fruit to provide excellent brain fuel, which can help you think faster and remember more easily. You could eat cantaloupes, oranges, strawberries, blueberries, or bananas, which are especially popular.

In terms of vegetables, raw carrots, bell peppers, Brussels sprouts, spinach, broccoli, and asparagus are good choices.

**3. Avoid brain blocking foods.** On exam day, stay away from foods made of white flour, such as cookies, cakes, and muffins, which require added time and energy to digest. Also avoid foods that are high in refined sugar, such as chocolates, desserts, and candies.

Do not have turkey before an exam as it contains L-tryptophan, an essential amino acid which makes you feel sleepy. Also avoid certain food combinations such as protein and starch together. These substances require added time when they have to be digested together.

When eaten alone, carbohydrates make you feel more relaxed than alert. So carbs are a good option for the day before the exam, but not on the actual exam day. In addition, carbs such as rice or potatoes, eaten in large quantities, can make you feel heavy and sleepy.

Avoid foods that a high in sugar, such as chocolates, desserts, and candies. They will send you off on sugar highs and lows — the opposite of stabilizing you during your long exam.

**4. Drink brain boosting beverages.** Make sure you drink enough water before and during your exam. Tea also works, though without a lot of sugar. Dehydration can make you lose your concentration, feel faint, and sap your energy. Don’t wait till you’re thirsty to drink a glass of water. If you wait till you’re thirsty, it means your body is already a little dehydrated.

**5. Avoid brain blocking beverages.** Avoid alcohol completely on exam day. Obviously, you cannot do well on an exam if you are drunk, have a headache, or are feeling nauseous. In general, reduce your drinking around exam time to avoid hangovers, dullness, or excessive fatigue.

Avoid sugary sodas and colas. Avoid caffeine, as it can increase your nervousness. However, if you are accustomed to drinking coffee regularly, then have a small cup or two. Try to eat something healthy along with your coffee. If you cut out the coffee suddenly and completely, you could end up with a caffeine-withdrawal headache.

**6. Eat light meals.** Eat enough to feel satisfied but not so much as to feel full. If you eat a big breakfast or lunch before an exam, you will feel drowsy and heavy. Your body’s energy will be focused on the digestive process rather than on providing your brain with the energy it needs to function efficiently. Instead, try a light lunch such as a salad with chicken or salmon.

**7. Don’t try any new foods**, drinks, or supplements just before the exam, even if they come highly recommended by friends or family. You don’t know how your body responds to them and you don’t want any surprises on exam day. Stick with food and drink your body is accustomed to.

**8. Consider taking multivitamins.** Most students do not eat a healthy balanced diet. When you survive on pizza, junk food, Red Bull, and coffee, your body ends up with a lack of essential vitamins and minerals. A multivitamin can help. The B vitamins especially strengthen brain functioning. Iron, calcium, and zinc can boost your body’s ability to handle stress.

**9. Snack intelligently.** In some countries, you are given a five- to ten-minute break in the middle of a long exam. Carry healthy snacks, such as protein bars, trail mix, energy bars, granola bars, almonds, walnuts, or fruit for such times, to keep your energy high. Avoid chocolates or sweet treats as the energy high could be followed by an energy crash during your exam!

**10. Get enough sleep.** Many students get into the habit of studying late into the night, hoping to cram in a little more information into their already exhausted brains. Instead, on the night before the exam, stop studying in the early evening. After that, take it easy, eat your dinner, lay out your clothes for the next day, pack your bag, take a shower, set a couple of alarms and head to bed early. You’ve done all you can. To function at your best on exam day, you need not only the energy that comes from healthy nutrition, but also the energy that comes from adequate, restful sleep.