

## SCIENCE &amp; ENVIRONMENT

# Food For Thought

## Student dietary habits prove dubious

BY LISA CIPRIANI

MONTREAL (CUP) — Those precious summer days of lying around the pool or beach are long gone, and suddenly you've been whisked back to school and find yourself knee-deep in essays and assignments.

Time, you've learned, is a luxury you can rarely afford, so when the hunger pangs strike you make a beeline for McDonald's and hope to be back in time for your next class. Sound familiar?

All right, I won't lie to you. There is no sure-fire remedy for a hectic schedule, but that is no excuse to develop poor eating habits during the semester.

There are plenty of small ways you can alter your daily routine, ensuring that you get enough nutrients to survive the coming weeks.

This doesn't involve drastically changing your lifestyle, but rather being aware of the food choices you make at school.

"[Eating habits] are as varied as people themselves," said Ann Mutz, a public health nurse who works full-time at Dawson College in Montreal.

"Budgetary reasons, demands of courses, sleeping patterns, and not taking time for breakfast are just some of the factors contributing to students' poor eating habits."

For students, the short-term effects of eating poorly may not be as obvious to discern as the long-term effects.

"Students have often come in to me with frequent colds, headaches, digestive problems, sluggishness, constipation and even an increase in clumsiness," continued Mutz.

"When you look into it a little further you realize that they're just not eating properly."

And in case you're wondering, breakfast really is the most important meal of the day.

"When I haven't eaten properly before school I get sleepier and crankier," said Lianne Morcos, a first-year Pure and Applied Science student at Dawson.

After several hours of sleeping, during which your body has not been able to eat, your

brain needs an energy boost.

Glucose, the brain's main energy source, is sensitive to the drop in blood sugar levels due to overnight fasting.

Therefore, problem solving skills, attention span, memory and physical work abilities are all affected when your body does not get that extra boost in the morning.

Most people who skip breakfast do not usually make up for missed nutrients later that day, so ensuring you eat a balanced breakfast as often as possible will improve your intake of important vitamins and minerals.

Eating a balanced breakfast regularly has also proven to help people keep their weight in check.

Those attempting to lose weight often skip breakfast, but this may result in the temptation to overeat later in the day when hunger pains catch up.

Of course the concept of sitting down to a nice, balanced breakfast every morning is probably so far from reality for most students that it seems next to impossible.

"[I miss breakfast] all the time once school starts," said Candace Julien, a first-year Electro-Tech student at Dawson. "I don't have time to eat breakfast because I have to get up really early for classes."

But there are several ways of getting around time constraints while you're getting ready for school.

Try fixing yourself a 'three minute-or-less meal,' such as instant oatmeal, if you like something warm in the morning. Add a glass of skim milk and fruit and, voilà, a healthy, low fat, fibre-rich breakfast prepared in less than three minutes.

When you really have to run, take some portables along with you such as a cereal bar, an apple and a container of milk.

Another day you might want to grab a whole grain bagel or bran muffin with cheese and a juice box.

Think of all that time wasted waiting for the bus in the morning when you could be sneaking in valuable nutrients on your way to school.

Missing breakfast, however, is not the only problem area in a student's daily schedule.

New and returning students are often tempted by the convenience of fast-food restaurants.

"Sometimes I get tempted because it's so much faster and easier," said science student Morcos.

Cutting down on junk food can be as simple as packing a healthy lunch to bring with you. The bonus here is that you can pack tons of healthy snacks to last you all day.

To take it even further, timing is everything.

If you generally have early morning classes then you might opt for packing your lunch at night before bed, Mutz suggests.

Once midterms come around, many students feel a huge step-up in stress.

What they don't know is that what they're eating is affecting how they're feeling.

Certain vitamins and minerals found in common foods actually relieve stress or uplift a depressing day.

For example, carbohydrates contained in pasta or potatoes produce a calming, relaxing effect on the body and mind.

When pressure from stress and personal life builds up, increasing your intake of carbohydrates in your daily diet may prevent some of those unwanted frazzled feelings.

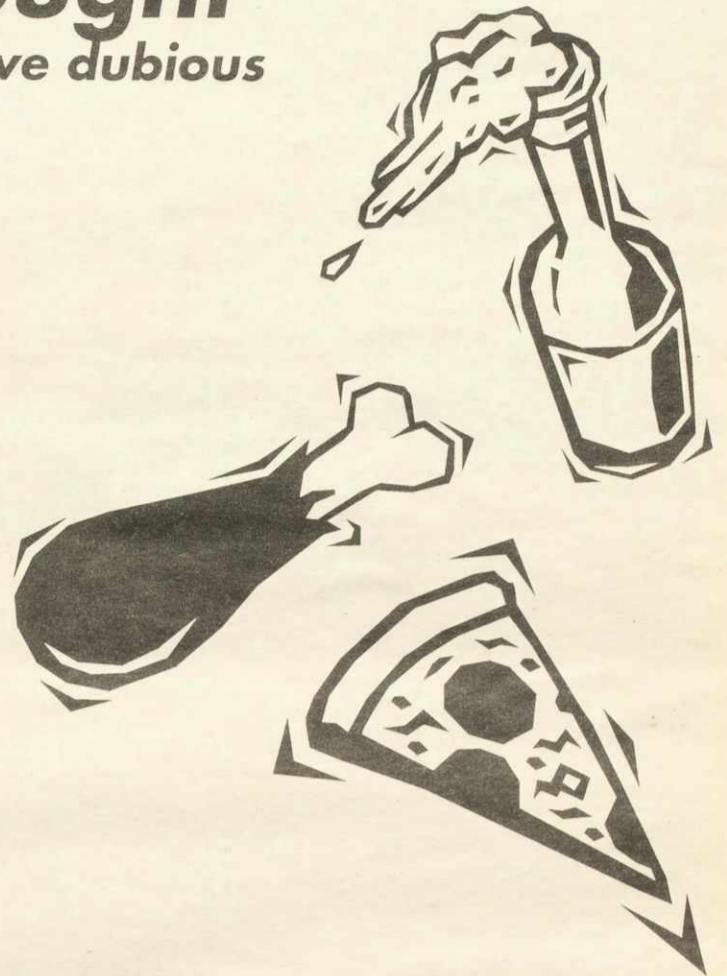
Protein is another very important element in our daily diet.

Foods high in protein — such as eggs, milk, poultry, meat, cheese and fish — can make you feel more alert.

The amino acid responsible for this, called tyrosine, increases your energy level as well as your level of concentration level.

These are just two basic examples of "Mood Food," or "Comfort Food," but there are many others.

"There's no simple solution, but my feeling is that like anything, eating properly has to become a priority for that person," said Nurse Mutz. "They have to know that it is important for them."



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