A monthly nutrition and wellness newsletter brought to you by University Housing and Dining.

A monthly nutrition and wellness newsletter should be included as part of an overall well-balanced diet.

The wheel of wellness – it is important and has benefits, but your overall health. Instead, think of breakfast as one cog in a winning fuel combination. Protein and healthy fats each time you eat will make you ace your next final, no matter how much studying for exams, finals can take a toll on your mental and physical health.

Nutritional food choices during this time can help you fuel your body and brain so they can function at their best to achieve better academic performance. Feeding properly from both a macro- and micro-nutrient level is key to maintain overall energy levels, enhance brain function and minimize cognitive decline. We can better manage the inherent stress associated with this season.

So, let’s look at fueling at the micronutrient level. Whole Grain Studies show that breakfast hunger due to insufficient food intake (i.e. energy) is associated with lower grades and an inability to focus among students, according to the Centers for Disease Control. The human body produces energy by breaking down the food we eat into three main macronutrients, which are carbohydrates, protein and fat. These three macros work together to fuel our basic metabolic functions, such as breathing, digestion and brain function. Despite making up only two percent of the body’s weight, the brain metabolizes more than 20% of your daily energy intake. Because the brain demands such high amounts of energy, foods we eat each day have an effect on brain function. The ability to concentrate and focus comes from having an adequate, steady supply of energy to the brain in the form of glucose in our bloodstream. Glucose is the most basic form of a carbohydrate and is the brain’s fuel source.

Because brain neurons cannot store glucose, they depend on the bloodstream to deliver a constant supply of this precious fuel every single day. Therefore, it’s important to not skip meals, like breakfast, and honor hunger cues throughout the day through sensible snacking so that you don’t deprive your brain of the energy it needs to function at its best. Additionally, aim to include sources of carbohydrates, protein and healthy fats each time you eat for a winning fuel combination.

Now let’s look at fueling at the micronutrients level – vitamins and minerals.

Micronutrient is a term that’s used to refer to the various vitamins and minerals present in food, such as calcium, iron, vitamin C and B complex vitamins. With the exception of vitamin D, micronutrients are not produced in the body and must be obtained through the diet. Each micronutrient serves a different purpose in human health, but they are all important to prevent disease and keep us functioning at our best. According to the Centers for Disease Control, research shows that deficiencies of specific nutrients, including vitamins A, B6, B12 and C, folate, iron, zinc and calcium, are associated with lower grades and higher rates of absenteeism and tardiness among students.

Upon taking a closer look at specific foods to promote brain function and academic success, there is strong evidence that the best “brain foods” to eat are the same ones that protect your heart, which includes:

- Leafy, green vegetables like kale, spinach, collards and broccoli are rich in vitamin K, folate, biotin and vitamin A, which can help improve memory.
- Fatty fish like salmon, trout and sardines are good sources of omega-3 fatty acids which play a powerful role in sharpening memory and protecting the brain from cognitive decline.
- Berries, blueberries and cherries are rich in anthocyanins and other phytochemicals that may support memory function.
- Walnuts are well-known for their role in heart health due to their alpha-linolenic acid (an omega-3 fatty acid) content but they may also improve cognitive function over time.

While there’s no guarantee that these foods will make you ace your next final, over time they can support lifelong brain function. Meals that are as basic as a cup of Greek yogurt and a handful of nuts can significantly improve memory and academic performance. For example, students who are physically active tend to have better grades and cognitive performance (i.e. memory). Also, while it may seem impossible during finals, trying to sleep for seven to nine hours a night is key to consolidating memories. Feeding your body through these healthy habits, nutrition, physical activity and sleep can better prepare you for academic success.

— Lindsay Wilson, MS, RD, LD

**Fun Facts**

- **Spinach**: This leafy green vegetable is rich in vitamins A, C, and K as well as manganese.
- **Selection & Storage**
  - Avoid spinach with dull or sunken leaves, yellow discoloration or spots.
  - Choose fresh spinach that are crisp and in bright green bunches with no insect damage.
- **Nourishing Noms**
  - **Feature Food: Spinach**
    - Leafy green vegetables, like spinach, are rich in brain healthy nutrients like vitamin K, folate, biotin and calcium.
    - Research suggests that these plant-based foods may help slow cognitive decline.
  - **Nutrition Facts**
    - Spinach is a good source of iron, potassium, riboflavin, vitamin B8, magnesium and copper.
    - It is also high in vitamins A, C and K as well as manganese.

**Microwave Poached Egg and Spinach**

The cooked egg is high in protein and healthy fats which can help keep you full longer and improve your overall health. 

**Ingredients**
- 2 large eggs
- 1 tbsp. Sriracha sauce
- 2 ½ tsp. vinegar
- 2 pinches chili flakes
- 1 cup spinach

**Directions**

1. Crack 2 eggs into a bowl.
2. Add water and vinegar to a microwave safe bowl and stir.
3. Microwave for 1 minute then remove and stir
4. Place spinach and water in a microwave safe bowl, add salt and pepper.
5. Cover with 2 sheets of paper towel and microwave for 1 minute and 30 seconds.
6. With a slotted spoon, scoop the egg out and place on top of the bed of spinach.
7. Top with Sriracha sauce, to taste.

**Wilted Spinach**

The cooked egg is high in protein and healthy fats which can help keep you full longer and improve your overall health.

**Ingredients**
- 2 cups hot water
- 2 large eggs
- 1 tbsp. Sriracha sauce
- 2 tsp. vinegar
- 1 tbsp. water
- 1 tsp. salt

**Directions**

1. In a microwave safe bowl, combine hot water, 2 eggs, salt and sauce.
2. Cover with 2 sheets of paper towel and microwave for 1 minute.
3. Remove and stir
4. Place spinach and water in the bowl and set aside.
5. Top with Sriracha sauce, to taste.