**When We Eat Matters!**

**Key Players in Meal Timing**

**Metabolism**
We all have basic energy needs, called resting or basal metabolism. These measures express minimum energy needs. Additionally we require energy to perform other functions such as movement and digestion. When we fuel our bodies in the most healthful way, we time our eating around when our bodies need the food most.

**Circadian rhythms** are the hormonal rhythms that are sensitive to light and dark; feeling awake when it’s light out and feelings of sleepiness as it gets dark. When we sleep during the day and stay awake well into the night, it can throw off the systems that rely on this light/dark interchange – causing our bodies to become confused as to when to sleep or eat. This confusion can lead to overeating and weight gain.

**Insulin**, a hormone, stimulates our cells to remove excess sugar from our blood to be used or stored. When we overeat carbohydrates, especially at night; when we don’t need as much energy (because we’re generally less active), our fat cells will take up the bulk of the “sugar” since our brain and muscle stores don’t need it at this time.

**Hunger** is an important part of knowing when to eat. However, due to many factors we might not always, or ever, be in tune with our hunger. This results in relying on when we “have time” to eat. For many, “that time” becomes later in the day and evening, when we are well past hungry and more likely to overeat.

Although meal timing is different for everyone, the goal is to spread out our meals and snacks in a way that optimizes access to food for energy (physical and mental).

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**MEAL TIMING**

**Optimizing Meal Timing**

1. Take a look at your day. When do you have access to food and opportunity to eat? If both time and food access are a challenge, make a plan of how you’ll handle this;
   - Pack your lunch, know what eateries are close by to your class so that you can swing by.
   - Don’t forget to allow time to wait – even if ordering in advance.
   - Do you need to purchase something at breakfast to eat for lunch?

2. Aim for 4-5 smaller well-balanced meals or snacks, or a combination, throughout the day – minimizing hunger.

3. Check in for “hunger awareness” throughout the day and try not to delay eating, if you notice you are feeling hungry.

4. Try to allow enough time to digest after eating and before going to bed (1-2 hours). You will sleep better.

5. If eating dinner hours before bedtime, ensure you have access to some higher protein snacks in case you get hungry: protein smoothie, string cheese, yogurt, hummus and vegetables or soup.

*Note: Athletes, given their special needs, need to check with a dietitian about how to tailor their eating.*
Sample Day

- If you wake up around 10:00 am, aim to eat a well-balanced meal/snack within an hour.

- Check for hunger every 3-4 hours; eat when you are first feeling hungry and when fuel is beginning to run low - avoid being overly hungry or “hangry”.

- Remember, hunger signs can be different for everyone; stomach growling, hard time concentrating, change in mood, headache, feeling anxious or fatigued.

  What are your hunger cues?

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8:00 - 11:00 am
1-2 cheese sticks and veggies.

10:00 am
1 cup of cereal: granola, or any low sugar, moderate fiber one WITH milk or plain greek yogurt and add nuts for some additional protein.

11:00 am
1-2 hard boiled eggs with pita or a serving of pretzels.

12:00 pm
Turkey, roast beef, ham or chicken breast sandwich with lettuce, tomato and cheese. You could also choose tuna or tuna salad.

1:00 pm
Fish, chicken, tofu; veggies and small portion grain or starch.

6:00 - 7:00 pm
Fish, chicken, tofu; veggies and small portion grain or starch.

7:00 pm
1-2 cheese sticks and veggies.