

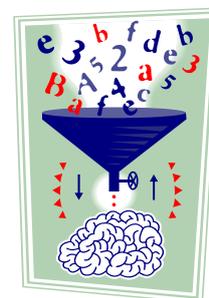
## Healthy Eating during Exams

**Written by Sue Atkinson:** (a retired dietician attached on a voluntary basis to Student Services to assist students.)

For our brains to function at their most efficient they need the best nutritional fuel.

Feeding our brains with 'junk food' will only lead to poorly functioning brains – not the greatest scenario for doing well in exams, helping with stress and enabling concentration and memory

Proven brain foods would be protein foods such as meat, fish (especially oily fish), eggs and cheese, beans and pulses(e.g. lentils); nuts e.g. walnuts; seeds e.g. pumpkin, sunflower; dried fruits e.g. fig, prunes.



Brains require a high proportion of energy to function so missing meals and surviving on high caffeine drinks will not help exam preparation and exam success.

### 5 Tips for Healthy Eating

#### 1. Regular Meals, especially Breakfast

Try to include wholegrain carbohydrate at each meal rather than high sugar foods and drinks to maintain a stable blood sugar level during the day.



High sugar foods give an initial boost of energy but this is not maintained and can lead to subsequent low energy, lethargy and low mood.

Wholegrain carbohydrates include porridge oats, wholemeal bread, wholegrain pasta, brown rice. Potatoes, beans and pulses also help to provide stable blood sugar levels

#### 2. Healthy Snacks

Try to avoid high sugar, high fat snacks and eat healthy options that will maintain stable blood sugars levels.

Fresh, dried fruit, nuts, seeds such as pumpkin and sunflower would be good options.



Snacks such as peanut butter or cottage cheese on celery sticks, cheese and oat or rice cakes, toast and Marmite or peanut butter, popcorn, yogurt, raw vegetables – carrots, peppers, fennel, tomatoes

#### 3. Good Omega 3 Fat Intake

Omega 3 has been shown to help brain function and increases concentration. It also helps to



improve your immune system when your body and mind are stressed. The best source of Omega 3 is oily fish such as mackerel, sardines, salmon, trout, and herrings. A great lunch would be tinned or smoked mackerel or sardines on wholemeal toast. Try to have oily fish twice a week. If you are vegetarian then seeds and nuts can also provide Omega 3.

#### 4. Keep Well Hydrated

Remember that it is recommended to have 1.2-1.5litres of fluid/day. Dehydration can cause listlessness and irritability and difficulty with concentration.

Avoid high sugar/caffeine drinks if possible as they can have the opposite effect, causing dehydration, giving low energy/low mood after an initial energy boost.

Coffee is best drunk in the day rather than the evening and can give a lift to our alertness provided intake is not excessive as it can then cause jitteriness and problems with sleep deprivation.

A milky drink or herbal drink such as camomile tea can help sleep at night and be calming

Try to drink water by preference and take some into your exam.



#### 5. Pre- Exam Eating

Try to have a light meal before your exam, enough to give you energy through the exam – hence a meal including wholegrain carbohydrate but not too much that you feel sleepy and lethargic.

Ideas for Breakfast

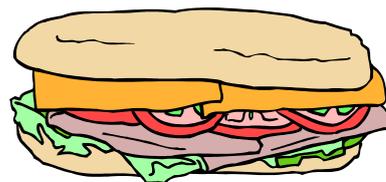
- Porridge and dried or fresh fruit
- Weetabix, shredded wheat, muesli or similar wholegrain cereal and fresh or dried fruit
- Egg(boiled, poached, scrambled, fried) with wholemeal or toast
- Yogurt with seeds, nuts and fruit
- Low sugar cereal bar and a glass of milk



bread

Ideas for lunch

- Oatcakes, cheese and fruit
- Baked beans on wholemeal toast
- Tinned or smoked mackerel/sardines on wholemeal toast
- Baked potato(including skin) with grated baked beans, tuna or other favoured filling
- wholemeal bread/roll/wrap with cold meat, cheese or peanut butter and salad
- omelette with cheese, ham, mushrooms or tomatoes and wholemeal bread



cheese,  
fish, egg,

During the exam period try to have a stock of healthy foods, drinks and snacks that you have pre-planned so when those moments of boredom, weariness, panic or times of just needing a break from your revision come along you are well prepared. Pre plan your meals during your exams so that you give your brains and bodies the best possible fuel for maximum efficiency and therefore greatest success. Some exercise alongside will only enhance a healthy appetite and refresh those overworked brain cells