Sizing Up Portions

Most nutrition recommendations come with guidelines that specify the number of servings to either consume or limit. The problem is, most people don't know what constitutes a serving or how to relate the information to what they're actually eating.

The revised Dietary Guidelines and companion Food Guide Pyramid sets the following targets for a healthy 2000 calorie diet:

- 6 ounces of grains, with at least 3 ounces of whole grains
- 2-1/2 cups of vegetables
- 2 cups of fruit
- 3 cups of milk/dairy
- 5-1/2 ounces of meat or protein foods
- 6 teaspoons of oil/fat

Unless you're in the kitchen on a regular basis, measuring and weighing various foods, it's very difficult to gauge the amount of food that would equal 1 cup, 1 teaspoon or 1 ounce.

Servings vs Portions

Adding to the confusion is the terminology: servings are a term meant to identify each "unit" of a particular food group. For example, 1/2 cup of cooked pasta would equal one serving of grain. But who eats just one half-cup of pasta? A portion of pasta at Home Zone would be 1 cup and, at the Pasta Station in the Boulevard, 2 cups. These portions would represent 2 servings and 4 servings of grain, respectively. So, a portion is the amount of a particular food that you're going to eat and that portion would determine the number of servings from the corresponding food group.

Estimation Tricks

To make it easier to figure out how much you're eating or being served, you can use the following estimation tricks:

- 1 cup = tennis ball
- 1 teaspoon = tip of your thumb
- 3 ounces of meat, fish, poultry = deck of cards
- 1 ounce of cheese = domino

Ounces: Volume or Weight?

Our archaic system of measurement includes two methods for determining ounces: weighed and measured. One cup equals 8 fluid ounces and one pound equals 16 ounces. Meats are weighed, while fruits, vegetables and dairy items are measured. Breads are based on weight: other grains can be either weighed or measured.

Set Your Targets

Once you have a handle on how much you're eating according to the various food groups, the next step is to evaluate how you're doing. Daily calorie targets are based on age, gender, body size and activity level and so vary accordingly.

College women should aim for a range of 2000-2400 calories and college men, between 2400-3000 calories. Adjust the target to account for a goal of weight gain or loss by about 500 calories per day.

Use the MyPyramid.gov website to determine your specific targets or arrange an appointment with Laura O'Gara, RD.
Spring Training

Now that you've had a month off to relax and refresh, it may be time to get your body in gear. We may still have some wintry weather to go through, but spring will be here before you know it! And there's no better cure for the winter blues than some regular exercise.

Maybe you've already made exercise a priority for the "new year". But do you have a plan? Whether you've been a regular at the gym or are just starting out, it pays to have a realistic plan for getting into shape so you can follow through and maintain your routine for longer than the first few weeks. About 60% of people who begin an exercise program drop it within six months. One of the main reasons people fail is that they have no real plan or quantifiable goals. Here are some tips to help you stick with the program!

Find a Consistent Time

The best way to make fitness a habit is to dedicate a set time for exercise and stick with it. Buddy up with a friend to go to Gosman and put it in your planner. Or, check out the group fitness classes on the athletics website.

Set Small Goals

Setting and achieving measurable goals increases confidence and self-efficacy. You're more likely to reach your goals if they're realistic. You can always add to a workout routine as you progress. After six to eight weeks, you'll have made fitness a habit.

Spice It Up

You should change your workout every month to keep reaping the physical rewards. Keep your body—and mind—challenged by changing your workout. Have fun!

Healthy Initiatives

This semester, Dining Services has several initiatives in the works to help patrons eat healthier. Working with the student Dining Services Advisory Committee, plans are in the works to unveil a program that identifies which items in the dining hall are the healthiest options. Called "Wise Choice", the program features a heart-shaped logo like the one used at the Balance station. Menu items that have the Wise Choice logo next to them conform to criteria for calories, fat, sodium and cholesterol. Wise Choice is now being used at the Home Zone station; look for more logos in the coming weeks.

Nutrition Information

With the help of a new software program, menu items are being analyzed for their nutritional content and this information will be available soon. It's hoped that the information can be made available on the Dining Services website and at each dining hall. For more information on this effort, please contact Laura O'Gara, RD, LDN at x63696 or via email at logara@brandeis.edu.

Whole Grains

Several new whole grain breads have been added to the sandwich stations and whole grain salads will begin appearing at the Balance station. We hope to taste-test a new wrap that is both higher in fiber and lower in calories than our current wraps.

Trans Fats

There has been a lot of national publicity in recent weeks about efforts to ban trans fats or create trans-fat free zones. Dining Services, along with the student advisory committee, are exploring ways to reduce the use of products that contain trans fats at Brandeis. Areas of interest are the fryolaters, bakery items and the use of margarine in the kitchens. We're looking into what other cities and companies are doing and hope to initiate similar changes on campus.

Calling All Seniors!

Hopefully you're in cruise mode academically, now that you're in your last semester. But there may be one more "course" to consider taking before you leave college. Don't worry, there are no grades and you don't have to pay for it—it's FREE! You can also decide how often you want to go and when.

What is this class? It's called Private Nutrition Counseling and it's available at the health center on campus. Maybe you want to get in shape for those job interviews. Maybe you just want to know if you're eating as healthy as you could be. Or perhaps you've decided to run a marathon this spring to add to your list of accomplishments. Whatever the motivation or area of concern, Laura O'Gara, RD, LDN is available to meet with individual students Mondays through Thursdays.

She can also help you set up an exercise program or refer you to a fitness professional for an assessment. In the past, seniors have also sought advice on healthy, quick recipes and eating out.

Don't lose out on your last chance to receive nutrition counseling for free! To make an appointment, call the health center at x63677.