

THE DO'S & DONT'S OF A DEADLINE DIET...

Deadlines are a stressful time for many, with the average student finding themselves confined to their desk or the library for long periods of time. Knee-deep in books and assignments, healthy eating habits are often catapulted out of the window as our main focus becomes conquering the workload in front of us. Grabbing a chocolate bar and a can of Red bull on a quick study break – or even skipping meals entirely – is suddenly all too easy.

However, while we may indulge in these fatty or sugary foods under the pretence it will supply us with the energy needed to complete our work, evidence suggests that poor eating habits actually decrease our performance during deadlines. While our hunger may be temporarily satisfied by a takeaway pizza after a long day of studying, it has been reported that fast food might actually decrease our ability to work effectively. David Benton's Neuroscience and Biobehavioural Review supports this, with a number of studies showing how 'a high carbohydrate meal' is 'associated with feeling less energetic'. Likewise, after consuming 'a sugary snack', the review also details how 'a short term increase in energy was followed by a longer-term fall in subjective energy'. In other words, if you're looking for a pick-me-up, sugar might not be your greatest friend.

With studies finding an association between negative affect and stress and intake of high-fat snack or convenience foods, there appears to be a strong connection between what we eat and our mental health and well-being. Despite the temptations of unhealthy food options during periods of high stress or missing meals to save time - which contribute to feelings of tiredness and agitation - a healthy and balanced diet during deadlines is paramount. While skipping breakfast to get a head start on our essay might seem like a good idea to the workaholics amongst us, if exercised regularly, this can soon become a dangerous pattern that can negatively affect both mind and body, in addition to causing nutritional deficiencies. Instead of missing meals in periods of high stress, try eating smaller meals more frequently, supplementing your diet with healthy snacks throughout the day (low-sugar protein bars and low-fat Greek yoghurt with honey is a personal favourite). To boost the success of your study session further, replace takeaways with foods that have slow releasing energy, such as fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids that contribute to healthy brain function. Additionally, incorporate high protein foods such as eggs, chicken breasts or meat substitutes (Quorn chicken pieces serve as an equally delicious alternative) oats, beans or lentils, all of which will aid in feeling fuller for longer. To accelerate energy and productivity levels, swap your sugary cravings with fruit and nuts which have shown to stabilise blood sugar levels and simultaneously decrease tiredness.

While the average student may have misconceptions about healthy eating being time-consuming or not satisfactory enough to fuel an all-nighter in the library, taking a slightly longer break to prepare more nutritious foods could be more beneficial to your studies in the long run. For further inspiration on healthy eating, check out our recipe ideas below.

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