



# Guide to Nutrition: College Student Edition

Guide to Healthy Living and a Balanced Diet  
Catered to College Students Lifestyle



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# Goals of this Technical Manual

The goal of this technical manual is to emphasize the importance of good nutrition among college students while teaching you how to make healthy eating work for your schedule!

Nutrition is so important, so finding ways to make it work for your schedule is essential to your well-being!



You will find sections on:

- How to Build a Healthy Plate
- Portion Sizes for Different Nutritious Foods
- Eating Healthy on a Budget
- Navigating Nutritious Eating on Campus
- Supplements, Energy Drinks, and Nutrition Myths
- Consistency and Realistic Expectations

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# Chapter 1

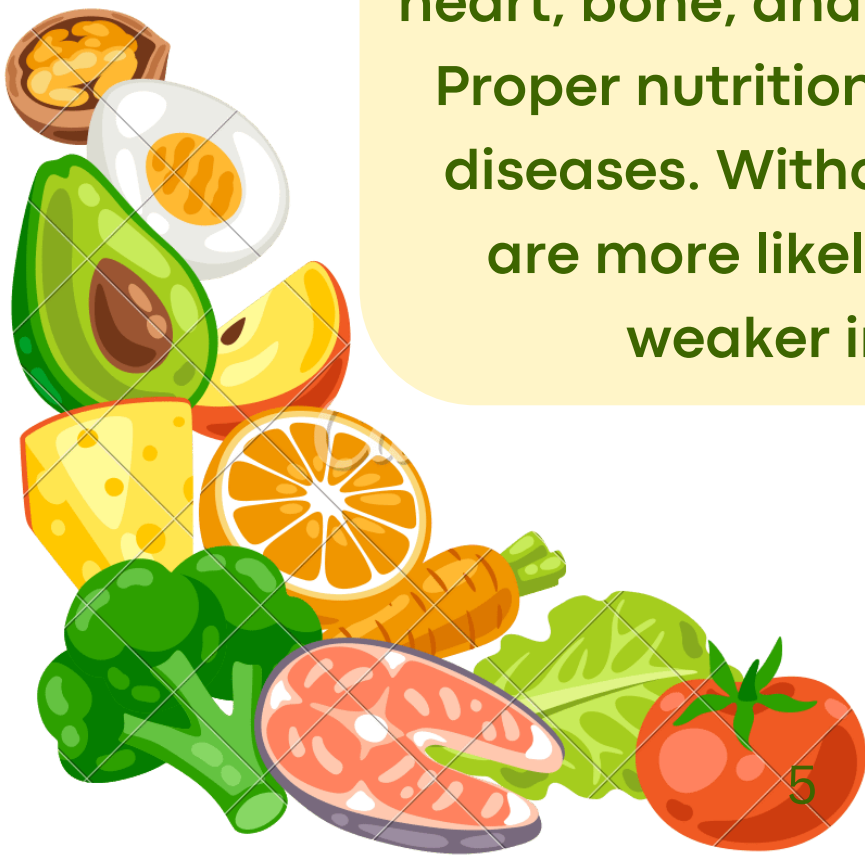
## Introduction to College Nutrition



# What is Nutrition and Why is it Important?

Nutrition is eating a balanced diet full of healthy foods on a regular basis.<sup>1</sup>

Nutrition is important because it helps your body maintain a regular, healthy state. This includes maintaining brain, heart, bone, and immune system health. Proper nutrition can also help prevent diseases. Without good nutrition, you are more likely to get sick due to a weaker immune system.<sup>1</sup>



# Why Does Nutrition Matter in College?

Nutrition is extremely important among college students! College students are more prone to unhealthy diets than most, but good nutrition can lead to:

- Increased Energy Levels
- Increased Focus
- Increased Concentration
- Increased Emotional Stability
- Decreased Stress
- Better Memory
- Better Overall Well-Being

Better academic performance comes from better nutrition!<sup>2</sup>



# Common challenges to eating healthy in college

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Common

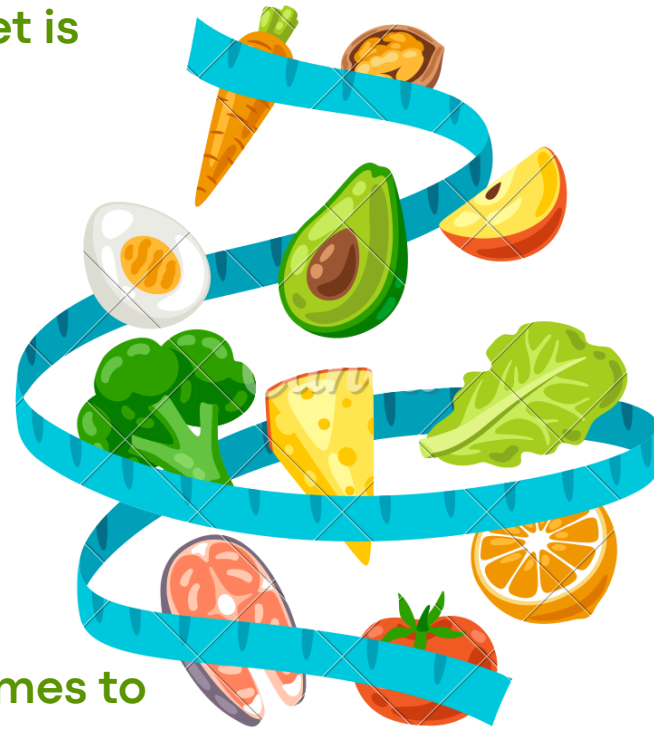
Maintaining a nutritious and healthy diet is not always easy, especially for college students.

Many barriers include:<sup>3</sup>

- Financial strain
- Limited time
- Food availability
- Stress eating

These are all real challenges when it comes to eating nutritious food while in college.

However, throughout this technical manual, you will discover many tips and tricks to maintaining good nutrition despite these hardships!

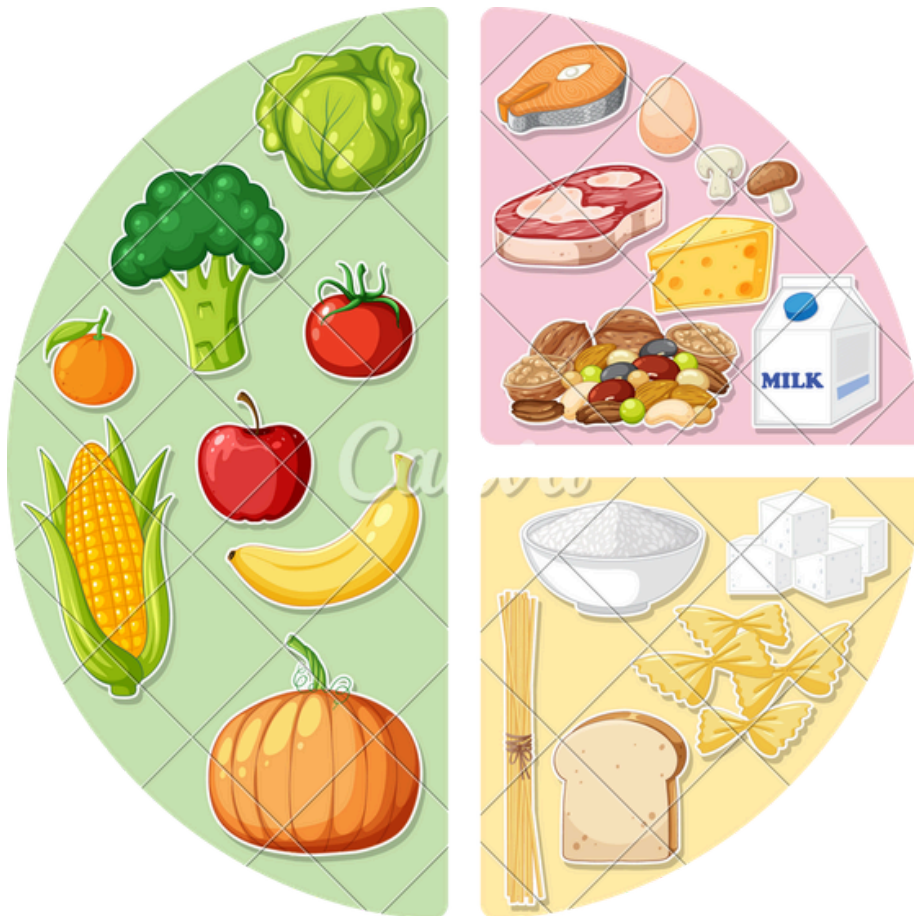


# Chapter 1 References

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3. American Dining Creations. Why Are Students Struggling To Eat Healthy In College? Accessed 4/25/25, <https://adc-us.com/blog/students-struggling-to-eat-healthy-in-college/>

# Chapter 2

## Understanding MyPlate and What Makes a Balanced Diet



# Nutrition Basics

- We all need a variety of foods to thrive!
- The building blocks of a good diet include fruits and veggies, protein, and carbohydrates.<sup>4</sup>
- In general, the more colorful your diet, the better.<sup>1</sup>
- This guide is not here to tell you what foods are good or bad; it is a resource encouraging you to introduce variety and moderation.
- As a busy college student, eating regular meals and snacks can help you maintain focus and give you the energy you need to stay active and succeed academically.<sup>4</sup>



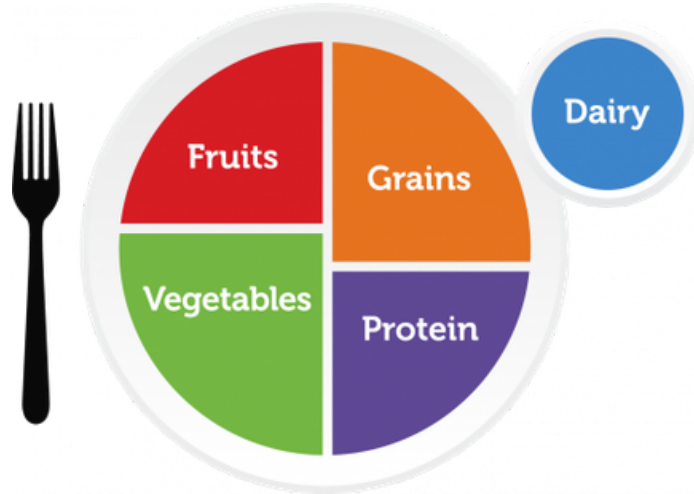
# How to Use My Plate

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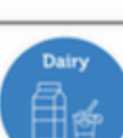
MyPlate divides your plate into 5 food groups:

- Fruits and Vegetables:  $\frac{1}{2}$  of your plate
  - Cover half of your plate with a mix of fruits and vegetables.
  - Emphasize variety: different colors = different nutrients.
  - Fresh, frozen, and canned all count.<sup>2</sup>
- Grains: just over  $\frac{1}{4}$  of your plate
  - Make at least half your grains whole grains.
  - Examples of whole grains: brown rice, oatmeal, quinoa, whole wheat pasta.
  - Examples of refined grains: white bread, white rice, regular pasta.<sup>2</sup>
- Protein: Just under  $\frac{1}{4}$  of your plate
  - Include lean meats (chicken, turkey), seafood, eggs, nuts, seeds, soy products, and legumes (beans, lentils).
  - Plant-based protein sources can be good for heart health.<sup>2</sup>
- Dairy (or Dairy Alternatives): A small side
  - Choose low-fat (1%) or fat-free dairy products like milk, yogurt, and cheese.
  - If avoiding dairy, choose fortified plant-based options like soy milk, almond milk, or oat milk to maintain calcium and Vitamin D intake.<sup>2</sup>



# MyPlate Interactive Nutrition Guide

Write down the foods you ate today and track your small changes, bite by bite.<sup>2</sup>

Food group targets for a 2,200-calorie* pattern are:	Write down your food choices for each food group.	Did you reach your target?	
 <b>2 cups</b> 1 cup of fruits counts as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 cup raw or cooked fruit; or</li> <li>• ½ cup dried fruit; or</li> <li>• 1 cup 100% fruit juice.</li> </ul>	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	 <b>Limit:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Added sugars to <b>less than 55 grams</b> a day.</li> <li>• Saturated fat to <b>less than 24 grams</b> a day.</li> <li>• Sodium to <b>less than 2,300 milligrams</b> a day.</li> </ul> Did you reach your target? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>   <b>Be active your way:</b> Children 6 to 17 years old should move <b>60 minutes</b> every day. Adults should be physically active at least <b>2½ hours</b> per week.  Did you reach your target? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
 <b>3 cups</b> 1 cup of vegetables counts as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 cup raw or cooked vegetables; or</li> <li>• 2 cups leafy salad greens; or</li> <li>• 1 cup 100% vegetable juice.</li> </ul>	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
 <b>7-ounce equivalents</b> 1 ounce of grains counts as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 slice bread; or</li> <li>• 1 ounce ready-to-eat cereal; or</li> <li>• ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, or cereal.</li> </ul>	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
 <b>6-ounce equivalents</b> 1 ounce of protein foods counts as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 ounce seafood, lean meats, or poultry; or</li> <li>• 1 egg; or</li> <li>• 1 Tbsp peanut butter; or</li> <li>• ¼ cup cooked beans, peas, or lentils; or</li> <li>• ½ ounce unsalted nuts or seeds.</li> </ul>	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
 <b>3 cups</b> 1 cup of dairy counts as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 cup dairy milk or yogurt; or</li> <li>• 1 cup lactose-free dairy milk or yogurt; or</li> <li>• 1 cup fortified soy milk or yogurt; or</li> <li>• 1½ ounces hard cheese.</li> </ul>	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	

\* This 2,200-calorie pattern is only an estimate of your needs. Monitor your body weight and adjust your calories if needed.

## Tips for using this guide:

### Track Your Meals Honestly

- Write down everything you eat and drink in a day—meals, snacks, and beverages.<sup>3</sup>

### Break Down Mixed Dishes

- Many meals combine food groups. By breaking meals down you can see all the food groups you are eating.<sup>3</sup>

### Have fun with it!

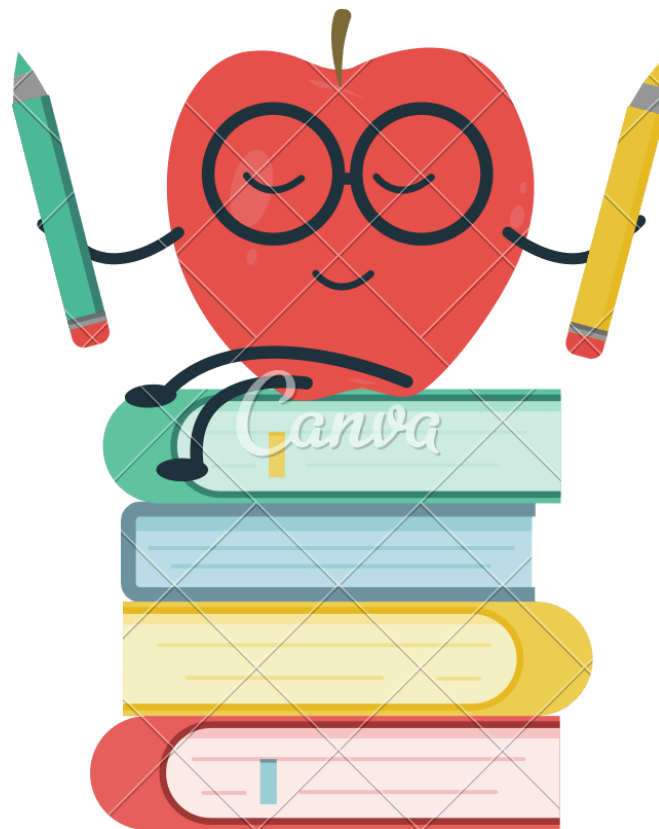
- Tracking what you eat can inspire you to make new healthy meals and try new delicious foods in order to meet your health goals.<sup>4</sup>

# Chapter 2 References

1. MyPlate.gov. What Is MyPlate? Accessed April 30, 2025.  
<https://www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/what-is-myplate>
2. MyPlate.gov. MyPlate Tools. Accessed April 30, 2025.  
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3. MyPlate.gov. Nutrition Information for Young Adults. Accessed April 30, 2025. <https://www.myplate.gov/life-stages/young-adults>
4. How to Eat Healthy in College: Nutrition Tips and Dining Options. Accessed April 30, 2025.  
<https://www.stjohns.edu/news-media/johnnies-blog/eat-healthy-in-college-student-life>

# Chapter 3

## Healthy Eating for Busy Students and Why it's Important



# The Reality of a Busy Student Life

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## Challenges:

- Balancing classes, work, activities leaves little time to think about what you are going to eat and how to make it healthy.<sup>1</sup>
- Students tend to go for easy-to-grab foods like fast food, vending machine snacks, and energy drinks, these often lack nutrition and can even have harmful effects on the body.<sup>1</sup>

## Why It Matters:

- Proper nutrition improves energy, mood, focus, memory, and immune function.<sup>3</sup>
- Poor nutrition linked to fatigue, poor academic performance, and higher illness rates.<sup>2</sup>



# Nutrition and Academic Performance

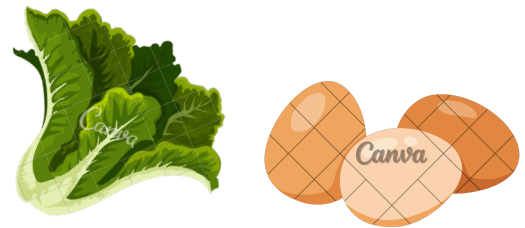
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## Brain-Boosting Foods:



Blueberries, leafy greens, fatty fish (like salmon), eggs (choline for memory).<sup>4</sup>



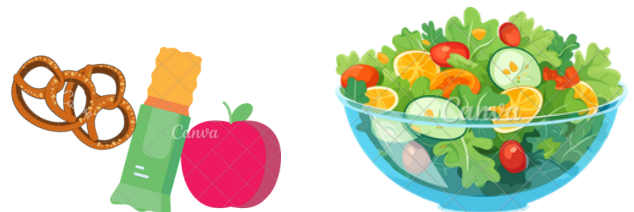
## Hydration:

Even mild dehydration can decrease concentration and memory.<sup>4</sup>



## Consistent Eating Pattern:

Skipping meals leads to crashes; aim for 3 meals + 1–2 snacks daily.<sup>4</sup>



# Chapter 3 References

1. Pelletier JE, Laska MN. Balancing healthy meals and busy lives: associations between work, school, and family responsibilities and perceived time constraints among young adults. *J Nutr Educ Behav*. 2012 Nov-Dec;44(6):481-9. doi: 10.1016/j.jneb.2012.04.001. Epub 2012 Sep 25. PMID: 23017891; PMCID: PMC3496024.
2. How to Eat Healthy in College: Nutrition Tips and Dining Options. Accessed April 30, 2025. <https://www.stjohns.edu/news-media/johnnies-blog/eat-healthy-in-college-student-life>
3. Education R& P. Healthy Eating Tips for Busy College Students. Recreation & Physical Education. <https://recreation.duke.edu/story/healthy-eating-tips-busy-college-students/>. March 13, 2024. Accessed April 30, 2025.
4. Healthy eating for better learning. International School. September 14, 2016. Accessed April 30, 2025. <https://www.international-school.edu.rs/student-nook/healthy-eating-for-better-learning/>

# Chapter 4

## Eating Healthy on a Budget



# Understanding Nutrient-Dense Food

## Examples of foods that are Nutrient-Dense<sup>1</sup>

### **Vegetables**

Frozen or by the pound depending on  
budget

### **Grains**

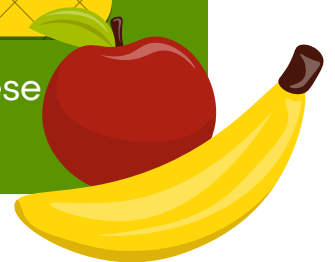
Oats, rice, canned beans

### **Fruit**

Typically frozen is better when on a  
budget due to increasing costs.

### **Dairy Products**

Milk, yogurt, cottage cheese



# What Makes Foods Nutrient-Dense?

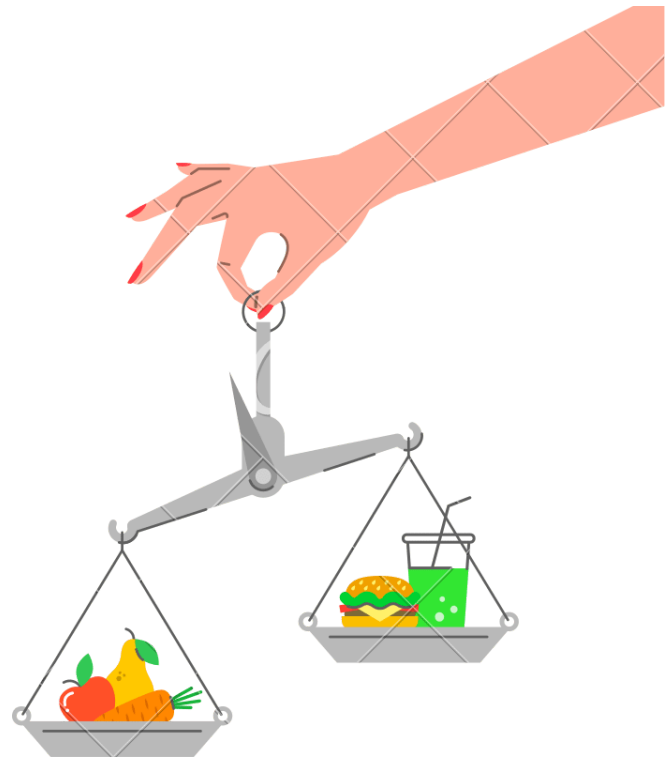
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Foods are considered to be Nutrient-Dense when they are high in Nutrients and low in calories. These foods are high in vitamins, minerals, complex carbs, and lean protein<sup>2</sup>.

## Simple Switches:

- ✓ White Bread to Whole Grain Bread
- ✓ White Rice to Brown Rice
- ✓ Chips and Dip to Veggies and Dip
- ✓ Sour Cream to Plain Greek Yogurt
- ✓ Processed Meat to Leaner Options
- ✓ Trade Chips in for Salted Nuts
- ✓ Soda to Water/Seltzer Water<sup>3</sup>



# A Guide to Grocery Shopping:

- **Shop Local and Smart**
  - Consider price checking at different grocery stores
  - Local Aldis and Farmer's Markets<sup>4</sup>
- **Do Not Go Shopping Hungry**
  - Going in to the store hungry can lead to Impulse Buys<sup>4</sup>
- **Get Comfortable With Frozen Food**
  - Fruits and Veggies last longer while frozen<sup>4</sup>
- **Plan for the Week**
  - Meal Prepping is Key to Eating Healthy on a budget<sup>4</sup>

## Avoiding Impulse Buys and Food Waste:

Knowing how to properly store food is important for making food last longer. Prep and save; cooking perishables first, to then reheat.<sup>5</sup>



Impulse buys are strategically placed in stores to get people to buy them. When you go shop eat before and bring a detailed list of what you need to avoid these types of buys.<sup>6</sup>

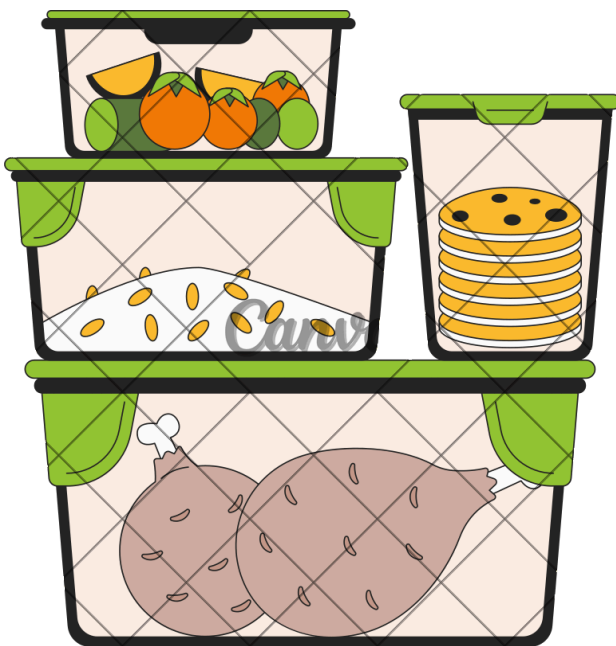
# Meal Prepping 101:

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**Why Meal Prep:** Meal prepping is convenient, reduces food waste, and efficient.<sup>7</sup>

**What To Meal Prep:** Cooked Grains, Pasta, Cooked Meat, Vegetables, Dips (Hummus), Freezer Meals.<sup>7</sup>



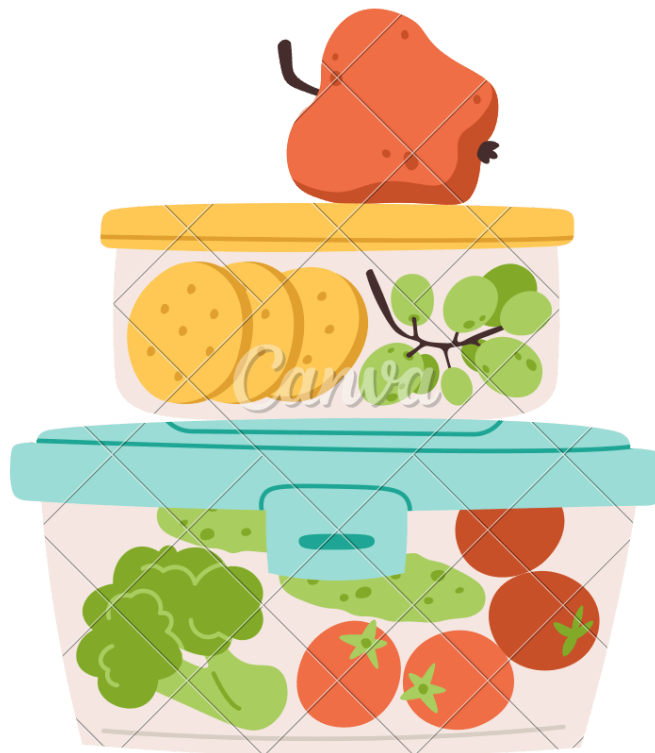
Using social media like, Tik Tok, Instagram, and Pintrest make it **easier** to find recipes.<sup>8</sup>

# Chapter 4 References

1. Elliott, B. (2023, February 28). 28 healthy foods that are incredibly cheap. Healthline. [https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/29-cheap-healthy-foods#TOC\\_TITLE\\_HDR\\_6](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/29-cheap-healthy-foods#TOC_TITLE_HDR_6)
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3. ORG, H. (2023, December 18). How can I eat more nutrient-dense foods?. [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org). <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/nutrition-basics/how-can-i-eat-more-nutrient-dense-foods>
4. Want cheap groceries? our Ultimate Budget Grocery List shows you how to shop. Good House Keeping. (n.d.). <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/health/diet-nutrition/a40619434/cheap-groceries-list/>
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7. Moncel, B. (2025, January 7). Meal prep 101: A beginners guide to meal prepping. Budget Bytes. <https://www.budgetbytes.com/meal-prep-101-a-beginners-guide/>
8. Uyar, O. (2024, November 25). How to leverage meal Prep Social Media Growth Activities?. Metrobi. <https://metrobi.com/blog/meal-prep-social-media-business-growth>

# Chapter 5

## Navigating Nutritious Eating on Campus



# Navigating the Dining Hall

Trying to eat nutritious meals at the dining hall can be hard. Here are a few tips to navigate the food choices and make the healthiest decisions! <sup>1</sup>



- **Visit the salad, vegetable, and fruit bars**

- If your dining hall has a salad bar or section for fruit and vegetables, take a peek! Try adding one to two fruits and/or vegetables to your plate, or make a side salad to go with a meal!

- **Eat foods filled with calcium**

- Calcium is good for bone health, so eating milk and milk alternatives, cheeses, and green, leafy vegetables will improve your health!

- **Avoid sugar as much as possible**

- Everyone loves a sweet treat or drink, but high consumption has many negative outcomes. Sugar can lead to negative health outcomes, so try to limit your sugar intake to an occasional treat.

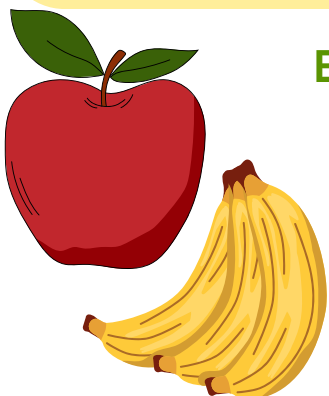
- **Have healthy, go-to snacks**

- If popping into the dining hall, or your dorm, for a quick snack, opt for something healthy, like a fruit, nuts, and pretzels! Try to avoid things like potato chips, french fries, and cookies.

- **Enjoy what you eat!**

- It is harder to maintain a healthy diet if you are forcing yourself to eat foods you don't like. Instead, find a handful of nutritious foods that you think are tasty and eat them!

Eating nutritious foods can be challenging, but knowing what to look for on campus, and discovering what you enjoy eating can help it become a little bit easier!

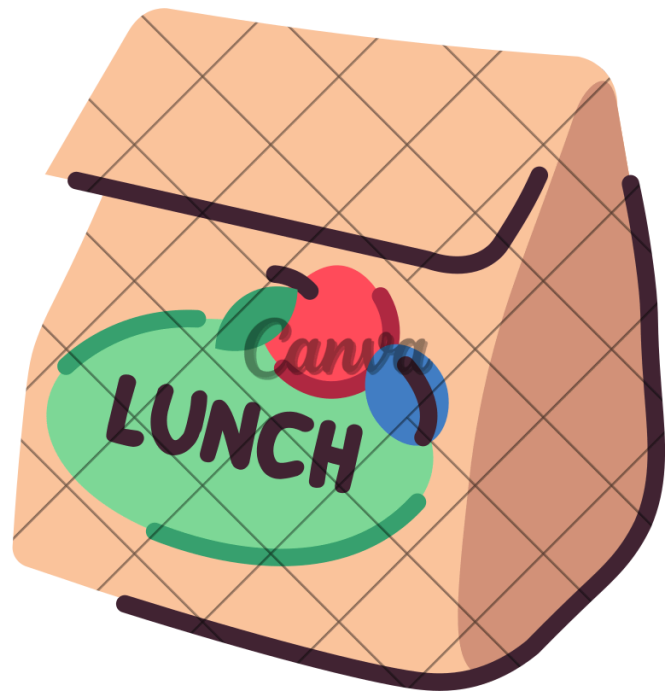
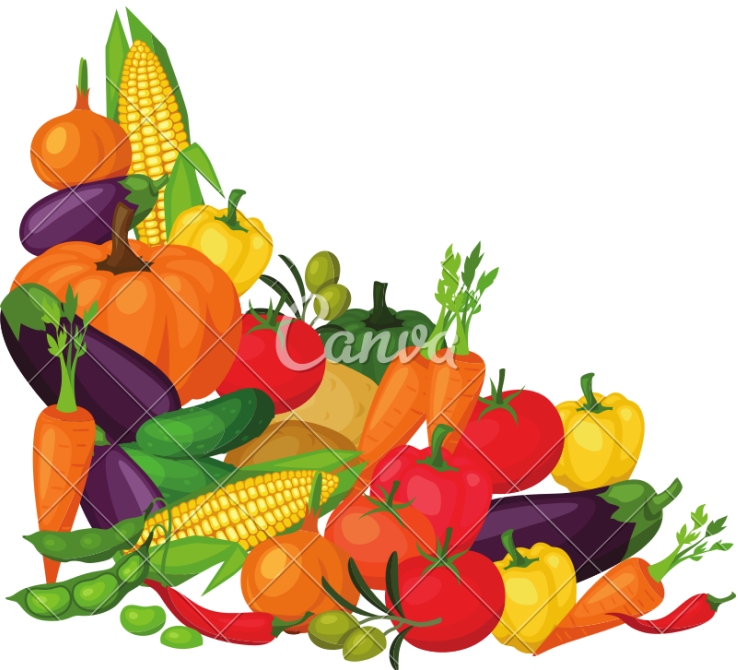


# Bringing Lunch to Campus

Sometimes, it is difficult to hold yourself accountable to eating healthy in the dining hall with so many options available.

If this is the case, you can try alternatives such as packing a lunch ahead of time and bringing it to campus.

This will ensure that a good balance of fruits, vegetables, protein, grains, and dairy are pre-portioned out for you when you get hungry, and you will be less likely to turn to unhealthy alternatives.



# Hydration

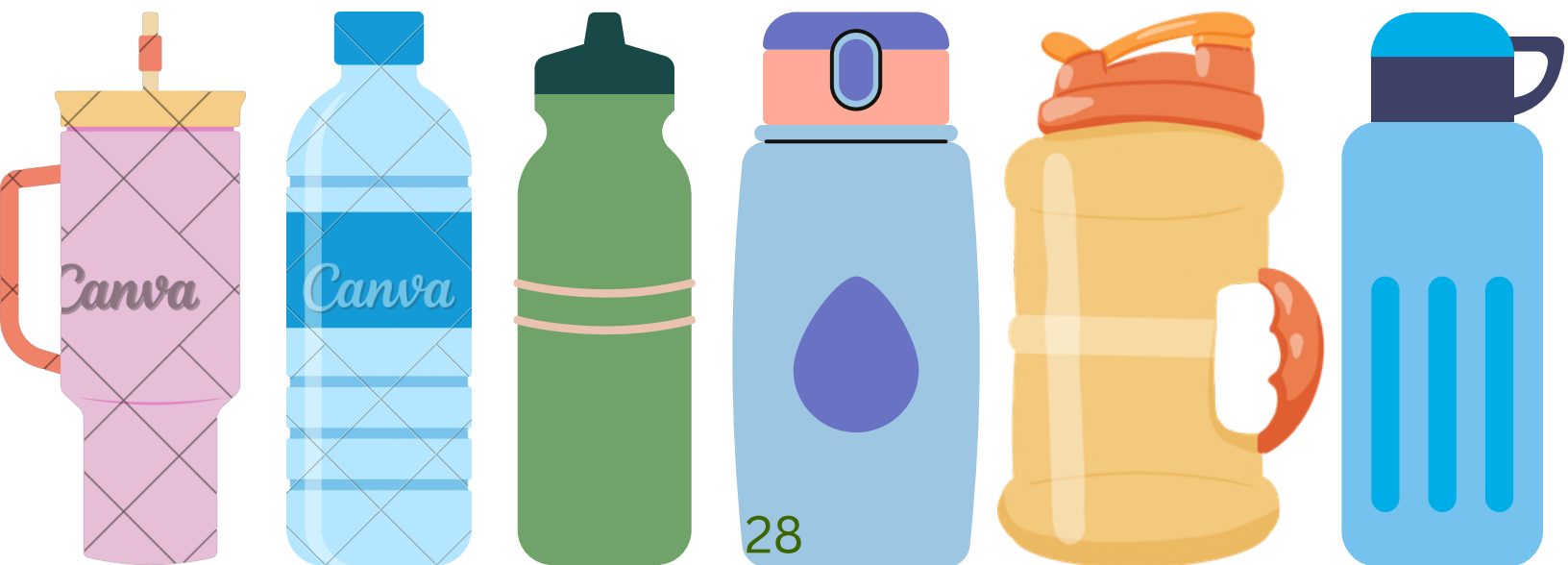
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Drinking a lot of water is one of the best things you can do for your body!<sup>2</sup>

Water helps move all of the nutrients from the healthy food you eat to your cells. It also gets rid of any waste products, and maintains organ health.<sup>2</sup>

Water is better for you than any other beverage. Try to **avoid sodas, juices, or sports drinks** when hydrating your body. They are filled with sugar which can hurt overall health, including increasing the chances of developing some diseases.<sup>2</sup>



# Chapter 5 References

1. American Dining Creations. Why Are Students Struggling To Eat Healthy In College? Accessed 4/25/25, <https://adc-us.com/blog/students-struggling-to-eat-healthy-in-college/>
2. Alicia Marzolf. Why it's important for you to drink water and stay hydrated. Accessed 4/26/25, <https://health.ucdavis.edu/blog/good-food/why-its-important-for-you-to-drink-water-and-stay-hydrated/2022/07#:~:text=Water%20is%20vital%20to%20our,be%20your%20go%2Dto%20beverage.>

# Chapter 6

## Supplements and Nutrition Myths



# The Truth about Supplements

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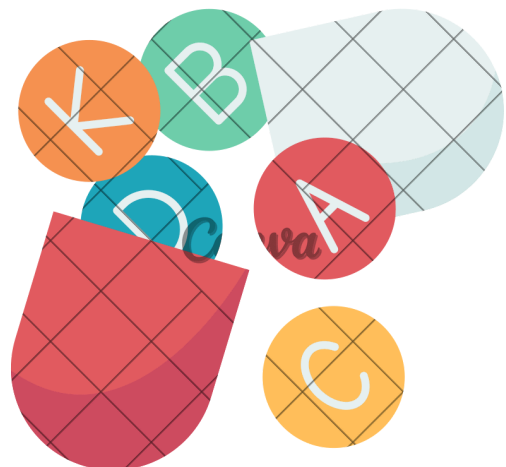
Cancer

## Are Supplements Beneficial?

Although popular, there is limited evidence that supplements provide true benefits for those already eating a balanced, nutritious diet. Taking supplements as instructed by a physician or the directions on the container will not cause damage, but **they aren't necessary**. The exception to this rule is if you have a vitamin deficiency, as deemed by a medical professional. Then, in this case it may be recommended to take a supplement.<sup>1</sup>

## In Summary

If you want to take supplements, you can, but they won't make a true difference in your overall health!<sup>1</sup>



# Popular Nutrition Myths

**Myth:** All healthy food is bland and unenjoyable.

**Fact:** Although you may not enjoy all nutritious food, most people find something from every necessary category of food that they enjoy! Find the nutritious foods you enjoy eating, and you can stick to those to start. Also, try experimenting with seasonings and healthy toppings for nutritious foods you find bland or unenjoyable... you may find a way to enjoy those foods too!<sup>2</sup>

**Myth:** All carbohydrates and fats are bad for healthy eating.

**Fact:** Your body needs carbohydrates and healthy fats to function properly. Do not cut them out of your diet all together. Substituting some white or refined grains for whole-wheat grains and eating healthy fats, such as avocado and nuts, in moderation is a great way to ensure your body is getting what it needs.<sup>2</sup>

# Popular Nutrition Myths Continued

**Myth:** Dairy is not nutritious and only leads to weight gain.

**Fact:** Dairy is one of the five food groups that your body needs. It has a lot of calcium and protein that your body relies on. Eating proper portions of dairy products that are low-fat or fat-free is a good way to ensure you are getting those important nutrients.<sup>2</sup>

**Make sure to get all dietary information from reliable sources, not places like social media or blog posts!**

**Proper nutrition is so important, so you want to make sure you have the correct facts about what is nutritious and what is not!**



# Chapter 6 References

1. Harvard Health Publishing. Nutrition. Accessed 4/25/25, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/topics/nutrition>
2. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney-Diseases. Some Myths about Nutrition & Physical Activity. Accessed 4/26/25, <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/myths-nutrition-physical-activity>

# Chapter 7

## Staying Consistent and Realistic





### Creating a flexible schedule that works for you:

- Keep the overall end goal in mind
- Determine what consistency means to you
- Meal prepping for 2 daily meals, allowing one night out to eat a week, etc.
- Make the choice everyday to stay on track
- Learn to prioritize healthy eating<sup>1</sup>

Being a student is a job in itself. Finding time to eat healthy, fueling meals should not be a job. Below is a weekly meal planner that could help you follow a schedule.



**Finding food logs or planner entries like this one could be helpful in maintaining routine**



The image shows a 'Healthy Eaters' food log template. At the top, there are two sets of fruit icons: a banana, strawberry, apple, grapes, and orange on the left; and an orange, grapes, apple, strawberry, and banana on the right. The title 'Healthy Eaters' is centered in blue. Below the title is a table with six columns: 'Name', 'Monday', 'Tuesday', 'Wednesday', 'Thursday', and 'Friday'. The table has ten rows, with the first row serving as a header for the days. At the bottom center of the page is a small logo for 'First Step'.

Name	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday

**Keeping track of meals may seem time consuming, but will be worth it in the long run to stay organized.**

# Setting Realistic Nutrition Goals

SMART goals is a great way to set realistic nutrition goals. This neumonic will help you break down the stress of starting a new habit.<sup>2</sup>

**S**

specific - describe exactly what you want to accomplish

**M**

measurable - if you can measure progress, you can celebrate accomplishments

**A**

Attainable- make sure you have the tools to succeed, and set reasonable goals

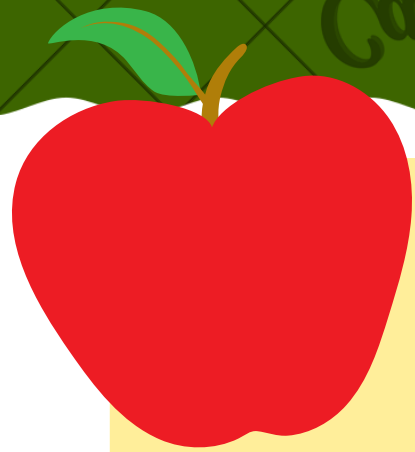
**R**

Realistic- start with small more specific goals

**T**

Time-Bound: a start date.

# Progress, not Perfection

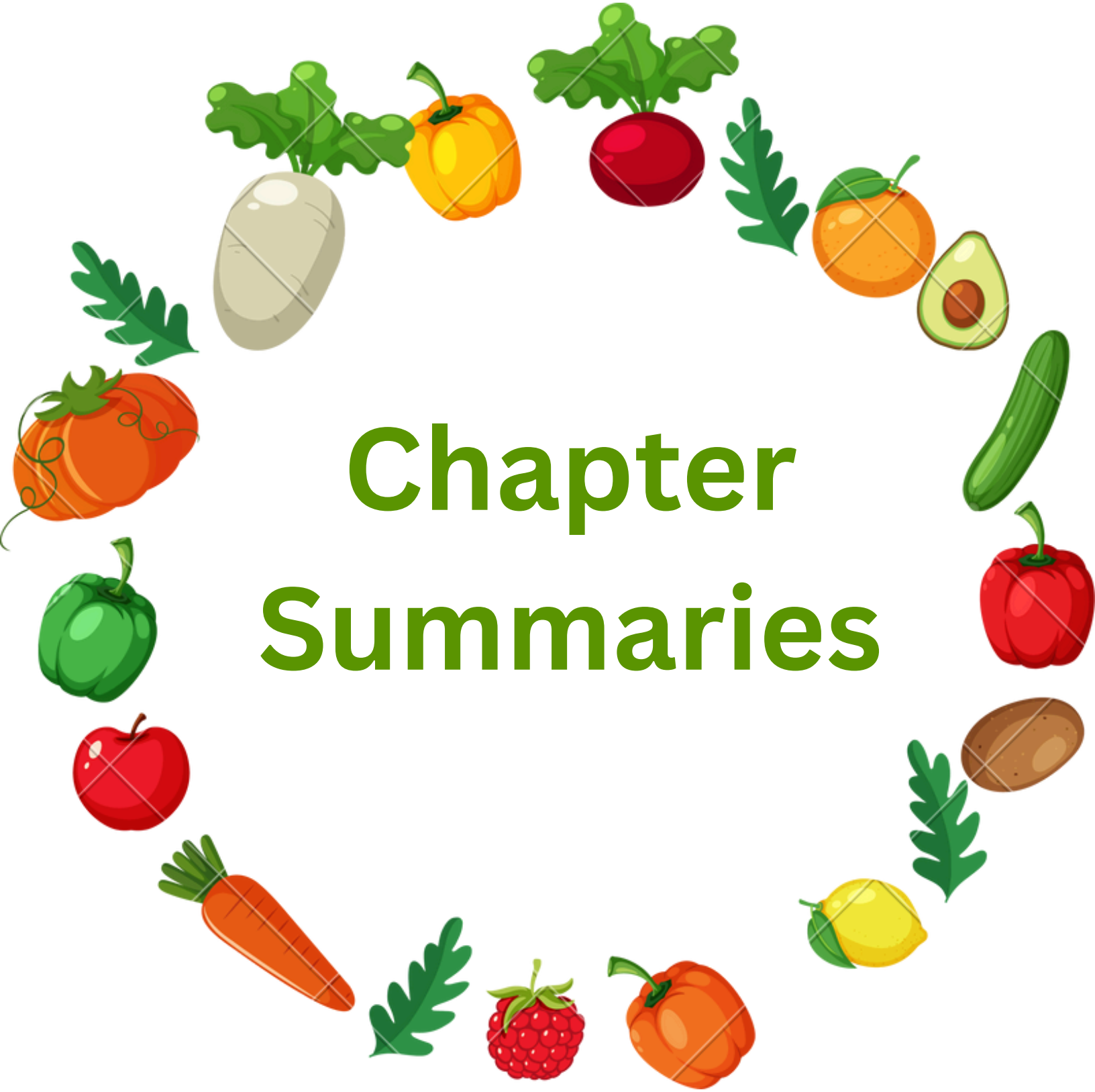


- Keeping up with health amongst other college student stressors its important to note resources on your campus. This technical manual is not to be confused with professional medical advice.
- Uga Student Outreach
- <https://sco.uga.edu/>
- Above is the UGA Student Outreach Link



# Chapter 7 References

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# Chapter Summaries



## **Chapter 1**

This chapter discusses what nutrition is and why it matters, especially for college students. It addresses the common challenges to maintaining a nutritious diet while in college. The goals of the technical manual are outlined at the end of this chapter.

## **Chapter 2**

This chapter discusses nutrition basics, and introduces MyPlate. It details how to properly understand and use MyPlate for tracking nutrition goals. There is also an interactive MyPlate nutrition guide included so that you can track your own meals and see if you are meeting recommended nutrition requirements.

## **Chapter 3**

This chapter discusses the challenges that students face with healthy eating, especially when it comes to time constraints and the convenience of unhealthy foods. It briefly mentions why good nutrition is important to college students, and it gives suggestions for foods that are beneficial for improved academic performance.



## **Chapter 4**

This chapter discusses what nutrient-dense food is and gives examples. It also details how to eat nutritious foods on a budget. This includes looking at the difference in price and nutrition levels between cooking meals at home versus eating out.

## **Chapter 5**

This chapter discusses how to navigate nutritious eating on campus. This includes tips for eating healthy foods at the dining hall, bringing nutritious lunch options, and staying hydrated throughout the day.

## **Chapter 6**

This chapter discusses the truth about supplements and nutrition. Popular nutrition myths and the facts behind them are also explained in this chapter.

## **Chapter 7**

This chapter discusses how to create a schedule to plan meals and stay consistent with eating nutrient-dense meals. As well as setting reasonable goals when it comes to creating a habit.



# Conclusion

Overall, this manual is designed to support college students in developing healthier eating habits by making nutrition both understandable and achievable. It acknowledges the everyday challenges students face and offers realistic, budget-friendly strategies for improving diet quality. With a focus on practical tools like MyPlate, meal planning tips, and myth-busting information, the guide encourages students to build sustainable habits that promote well-being throughout college and beyond.