How can I eat well at college? [1]

Dear Alice,

How do you maintain a healthy and low-fat diet while living in the college dorms? I am concerned that I will either gain tons of weight or become anorexic. Please help.

Confused and College Bound

Answer

Dear Confused and College Bound,

You are not alone with your concerns. Going to college is a big step in a person's life involving major changes. You and those around you may be living on your own for the first time, making decisions on a buffet of issues, including what to eat.

Eating healthy at college is possible. Many college dining services are offering more healthy choices and are often quite receptive to students' concerns and dietary preferences. But, this is only part of the challenge. In an environment where time, friends, and finances may combine in new ways, having options available only solves some of the puzzle. It's important to experiment with what works best for you. For example, that traditional idea of three square meals a day has been updated with a more contemporary concept of eating five smaller meals spread throughout the day. Steer clear of diets or fads, especially those that drastically limit a particular nutrient. Remember, balance, moderation, and variety win out over trendy and extreme. For some practical tips, navigate through the many options on Choosemyplate.gov [2]. Plan ahead when possible so you don't have to rely on vending machines when you're hungry; think of ways to incorporate fruits, vegetables, and whole grains on a daily basis. Eating more of these will fill you up and possibly even enhance your already stellar brain power.

Making time for physical activity is important, too. Most college fitness centers have a variety of movement classes and options. When the weather is right, grab a friend and walk, run, bike, or blade outdoors.

Now, to address the second part of your question: an eating disorder, such as anorexia nervosa, is less about food, eating, and body weight. It has more to do with mental health, emotional, physical, socio-cultural, and family issues. If this is a particular concern of yours,
you might want to take a look at Eating disorders vs. normal eating [3]. Additionally, you can make an appointment with a health care provider or a registered dietitian to discuss your concerns.

Give yourself some time to adjust to a new environment and ask for help when you need it. Everything in moderation, even moderation.

Enjoy your time at college,

Alice!

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