

# FOOD IS FUEL BODY AND MIND

Part of eating a healthy, balanced diet is working to manage your daily energy store or your fuel. From the very moment that food hits your tongue, your body works diligently to convert food into energy. When you eat a variety of food and in healthy portions, you can optimize your energy – energy to participate in activities you love, accomplish work tasks efficiently and keep you in good health.



Like a car uses gasoline for fuel to run optimally, see if you can practice viewing **food as fuel** to help you choose the best meal options and expand your energy capacity. Food can fuel your mental energy, focus and concentration that can lead to greater productivity at work and at home. Your brain relies exclusively on glucose for energy. Eat strategically by eating light

and eating often – Eat small portions every three hours to maintain even energy levels. It is important to remember that **your energy needs may change** depending on the stage of life you're in as well as circumstances, such as being pregnant, suffering from illness, recovering from injury, etc.

From day to day, hour to hour, your body needs

a variety of nutrients to function. That is why it is important to **choose nutrient-dense foods** (vegetables, fruits, lean meat, whole grains, healthy fats) rather than empty caloric foods (chips or candy bars). The nutrients your body needs each day include **vitamins, minerals, water, proteins, fats and carbohydrates.**

## STRATEGIC EATING

The key to eating for optimal energy during your day is not only to eat a balanced diet but to eat the right types of foods at the right time. For starters, if you want to maintain energy all day, try your best to **avoid skipping meals** because skipping meals can force your body to break down muscle tissue if your body is not getting enough fuel (nutrition). Another way to maintain

peak energy is to **eat healthy portions.** Try eating the amount of food your body will need for the next few hours only. This will prevent overeating. Some experts recommend estimating the amount of food that can fit in your two hands cupped together and use this as a portion guide for meals and snacks.

Ensuring your "gas tank" is never empty helps your body maintain a steady blood sugar level, which will help you sustain your energy all day long. When you eat strategically, you can also improve your metabolism, support your brain function and overall mood, manage your cravings, maintain healthy muscle mass, prevent excessive fat storage, and more.

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Coming January 2017 to *SouthernLifeStyle Rewards* is the **Tobacco Free Me Program.**

Southern Company will be offering a free tobacco cessation program to medically enrolled employees and their spouses/domestic partners. Participants will have the choice of a self-directed program, or a coaching program. Both interactive programs offer education about the biological mechanics of their tobacco use, the addictive process and the path to becoming tobacco-free. While both programs are web-based and will be accessible in your wellness portal, the Coaching program also includes monthly calls with expert coaches who employ motivational techniques and cognitive exercises to initiate and reinforce self-motivation and the desire to quit.



The best way to ensure you are eating for optimal energy throughout the day is to be prepared with healthy snacks so you can refuel wisely when you need it most. For a balanced, healthy snack that can help you maintain optimal energy, **combine healthy fats, complex carbohydrates and lean protein.**

**HEALTHY FATS** assist your body in breaking down and using vitamins. Fat is also known as stored energy. Your body needs healthy dietary fat (fats that you eat rather than fats that your body produces) for energy. Healthy fat is found in foods like olive oil, avocado, nuts, seeds, fatty fish like salmon or albacore tuna, and eggs.

**COMPLEX CARBOHYDRATES** help give your body longer-lasting energy and are found in foods like vegetables, whole-grain breads, pasta, high-fiber cereal, brown rice, quinoa and legumes.

**LEAN PROTEIN** will help you stay full longer. Protein is used in your body to build muscle, support your immune system, maintain healthy hormone function and more. Foods like beans, unsalted nuts, nut butters, lean meat and seafood, and Greek yogurt contain higher amounts of lean protein.

### Some examples of healthy snack combinations include:



Whole fruit, such as orange slices, with a handful of assorted nuts



Whole-grain crackers and low-fat cheese, like mozzarella



Carrots and sweet bell peppers with hummus



Celery sticks with peanut butter



Apple slices dipped in Greek yogurt sprinkled with cinnamon



Spicy brown rice or quinoa and beans (prepared the night before or at the beginning of the week)



Whole-grain toast with peanut butter or nut butter of your choice

### THE IMPORTANCE OF BREAKFAST

If it works for you, set the stage for optimal energy by eating breakfast each day. Break the overnight fast and eat breakfast within one to two hours of waking up.

### TAKE NOTE OF HOW DIFFERENT FOODS MAKE YOU FEEL

Some foods have different side effects for different people. As you introduce new foods in your diet, or as you change up how often you eat, take note of how you feel. Do certain foods make you feel sluggish, give you a headache or brain fog? Are there foods that make you feel refreshed, light or sustain you longer? Play with your food, experiment and find healthy options that you enjoy and do your body good.

### Interested in More?

Check out this resource:

Harvard Health Healthy Eating Plate

<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-eating-plate/>

### COMING IN FEBRUARY:

#### Nutrition Mini Challenges

Be sure to check out the upcoming nutrition mini-challenges that will provide you with simple and fun ways to approach nutrition.

Visit your **SouthernLifeStyle Rewards** site at [www.socorewards.com](http://www.socorewards.com) to learn more!

### COURSE SPOTLIGHT:

**SouthernLifeStyle Rewards** is offering a new interactive education course titled 'Achieving a Healthier Weight'. Learn about healthier habits and managing your weight and earn \$10 into your HRA/TSA account by completing the course and small quiz.

Be sure to check for other education course offerings through the 2017 year!