**Brain Power-Can Diet Affect Learning?**

Summer days are slipping away and the flurry of new textbooks and stylish backpacks tells us the Back to School Season is here. Despite a well known TV commercial that shouts “it’s the most wonderful time of the year,” there is one thing that tends to remain a challenge for both eager learners and busy adults alike-mealtime.

In a world where fast food restaurants stand tall on every street corner, and candy bars beckon us from the checkout line, maintaining a balanced diet can feel like a heroic feat. It can also seem like a quick solution to solving the mealtime dilemma. But, before diving headfirst into a mountain of fries in despair, you need to consider that dietary choices could be sabotaging your quest for knowledge and also that of your young learner. What we eat may impact how the brain decides to behave during study time. If you’re thinking this doesn’t apply to you because you’ve been out of school for decades and your kids are grown, consider hanging in there a bit longer because this applies to all of us. Both growing minds and grown minds require proper fuel.

Imagine your brain as a high performance sports car. Just like the right fuel and maintenance keeps the car performing at its best, the right nutrients allow the brain to do the same, zipping through complex calculations and deciphering solutions to the complexities of daily life. When we use subpar fuel in our prized vehicle, it sputters and stalls and causes a lot of frustration. Similarly, when we indulge in a diet *primarily* consisting of processed snacks and sugary delights, the brain may not be firing on all cylinders. Note the key word here is “primarily.” We want to, and should indulge from time to time.

The allure of the office vending machine is not just your imagination—sugary treats designed to entice can lead to a roller coaster of highs and lows, both in your energy levels and your ability to learn. Downing a soda might give a temporary burst of energy, but that’s often followed by a sudden crash. Fast food indulgences might send your taste buds to euphoria, but do this on a regular basis and your brain will be calling out for help! A once a week “celebration meal” (as my coach and mentor calls it) won’t put you over the edge, but if you’re making it a steady diet, chances are your brain may not appreciate the after party.

To break it down a bit, the brain is like a tiny command center, orchestrating everything from solving equations to belting out the lyrics of your favorite song. To keep this mental symphony going, the brain requires a steady supply of essential nutrients to enhance cognitive functions, support memory, and possibly even help prevent those embarrassing “tip-of-the-tongue” moments. Nutrient dense foods like an array of colorful fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains are what the brain deserves. They’re packed with antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals that can help reduce inflammation and promote healthy brain function.

The good news doesn’t stop there. Research suggests that eating a balanced diet isn’t just about avoiding the pitfalls of unhealthy foods—it’s also about embracing the wonders of food that can enhance your cognitive abilities. Blueberries, for instance, have earned the nickname “brain berries” due to studies that show their potential to improve memory and learning. A 2017 article from Rutgers.edu cites one such study where young and old participants who ate blueberries showed an increase of blood flow to key areas of the brain, improvements in memory, and attention to required tasks.

In the end it’s all about balance and choices. Another coach and mentor of mine says, “once you know something, you can choose not to do it, but you can’t unknown it.” It’s true, so think about that before you trade a home cooked meal for a fast food option and know that a poor diet may be holding back your inner genius (or your little genius). The internet is filled with healthy recipe options of snacks and meals that can be prepared in minutes using budget friendly ingredients. If you check it out and find one you like, please let me know!

The recipe below is a cookie treat made with 3 simple ingredients that kids of all ages enjoy. I’ve been making this recipe (from Dani Spies of Clean & Delicious) for years but tend to modify recipes over time. You can make it a 4 or even 5 ingredient cookie by adding walnuts, raisins or even unsweetened coconut flakes.

**3 Ingredient Chocolate Chip Oatmeal Cookies**

2 very ripe bananas

⅓ c dark chocolate chips (plus a little more)

1½ c rolled oats

Mix all together, use a tablespoon to scoop and form cookies

Bake at 350 for 10 minutes- cool on a wire rack and enjoy!

Store in refrigerator

***JoAnn Begley is a Certified Health & Nutrition Coach with 24 years experience in holistic, mind/body therapies. She and her husband Jerry have two children and live in North Branford. Reach out with questions or comments to joann@wellnessfusion.net or wellnessfusion.net.***