

Healthy Living: The 3-Legged Stool

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At the beginning of the semester in my Life Management classes I talk briefly about “the 3-legged” stool. My premise is that healthy diet, regular physical exercise, and adequate rest are the three basic components of healthy living. If one of these components is lacking, then an individual’s health can suffer. It isn’t until the middle of the semester that we talk at length about eating well and staying healthy. The challenge is that at that point students have often settled into 8 weeks or more of unhealthy habits.

When I polled my class this winter session, only 3 students had a regular exercise plan and most had poor diets coupled with inadequate rest. Yet, when we talked about the benefits of eating well, regular exercise and adequate rest, the majority agreed they would benefit from better habits.

Healthy Diet:

My class recently watched a video about the 2005 Food Guide Pyramid. When the topic of vegetables was presented, several students expressed their dislike of vegetables. Many of our students actually think they’re getting the required vegetable servings with the lettuce, pickles, and tomato on their hamburger. The reality is that our students eat fast food...and so do many of us. Navigating fast food, as well as other restaurant menus, can be a challenge, but many restaurants help us out by listing their nutritional information at their counters or on their websites.

Take Red Robin for example. One student’s favorite meal is a Red Robin Whiskey River® BBQ Burger with Very Berry Raspberry Limeade. While he’s eating his burger, let’s assume he also has some Red Robin Steak Fries, after all, what’s a burger without fries? How many calories is he consuming? The burger weighs in at 1129, the limeade at 213 (per glass), and the steak fries at 390 calories for a total intake of 1732 calories. According to the US Department of Agriculture My Pyramid website www.mypyramid.gov, that’s 67% of the 2600 recommended daily calories for a young man in his early twenties who isn’t exercising regularly. That leaves him just 868 calories for the rest of the day; less if he has refills on his lemonade or gets dessert.

I personally find the My Pyramid website to be an excellent resource. If you haven’t used it yourself, try it out and use it in class when you talk about eating well.

Another way to get students interested in improving their eating habits is by showing them how to read food labels. I love to show a 12-ounce can of Coca-Cola Classic along side 10 sugar cubes. Each sugar cube is 4 grams of sugar and the can of Coke has 39 grams of sugar. That’s a lot! You should have heard the gasps when students learned that Krispy Kreme donuts have only 10 grams of sugar and that four donuts have the same amount of sugar as a can of Coke. Don’t worry, I don’t encourage them to eat multiple Krispy Kreme donuts. After all, each 200 calorie donut gets half it’s calories from fat.

Another fun resource to look at is www.calorieking.com or the book “The Calorie King Calorie, Fat, & Carbohydrate Counter” by Allan Borushek (The Calorie King). It’s a

great little reference book to pass around so students can look up their favorite foods and learn about what they're eating.

"Family" menu planning is great activity, too. I put students in "family" groups and have them plan a healthy dinner for a family of four for two nights. One night they have \$10 to spend and the other they have \$20 to spend. The key is that they make healthy choices. The My Pyramid website becomes very helpful here. Most students are surprised that they can actually eat healthy food on a \$10 dinner budget.

Regular Physical Exercise:

Of the three students from my class who said they had a regular physical fitness routine, one works out regularly at the Mt. SAC Exercise Science Wellness Center. We are very fortunate to have the Wellness Center on our campus. It's basically a gym for students, faculty and community members. Basic services include memberships at very affordable prices, fitness assessments and graded classes. The staff at the Wellness Center is very friendly and supportive. It's a great and very convenient place to work out.

One of the fitness assessments they perform at the center is measuring body fat. When my Life Management class tours the Wellness Center we usually have a volunteer step forward to have their body fat analyzed. The center uses two methods, the skinfold measurement and hydrostatic weighing (underwater tank). Students are amazed that a person can look healthy, and yet not have a healthy body fat percentage. Healthy ranges for men are 12-20% and for women are 20-30%, depending on age and level of physical fitness. See specific ranges at <http://www.healthchecksyste.ms.com/bodyfat.htm>. Some people prefer the BMI (Body Mass Index). Since it only takes into account a person's height and weight (and makes no distinction between sex or body type) in determining a healthy weight, it's important to use only as a guide. <http://www.healthchecksyste.ms.com/bmi.asp>

While these tests can help motivate an individual, they aren't necessary in order to begin a physical fitness routine. What is important is that you get moving on a regular basis. The "2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans" <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/chapter1.aspx> report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that adults should accumulate at least 30 minutes a day of moderate-intensity physical activity most, preferably all, days of the week. Their minimum recommendation is for 150 minutes per week.

Your routine should include exercise that improves your cardiorespiratory endurance (walking, running, or aerobics), muscle strength (weight lifting) and flexibility (yoga). If weight loss is a goal, then 60 or more minutes per day are recommended.

Unfortunately, none of my students this term were taking a PE class, something that I recommend. For \$10-\$20 students can work out on campus two or more days a week and earn college credit for it. Sometimes just knowing that attendance will be taken can help motivate a student to work out.

One of the most common reasons my students give for not working out is that there just isn't enough time in the day. I think 30 minutes of exercise a day is worth it when I sleep better, have more energy, handle stress better, and look healthier. Besides,

it doesn't have to be 30 minutes in a row. Time to get moving! You can use the My Pyramid Plan on <http://mypyramid.gov/index.html> to guide you in developing your own fitness plan.

Adequate Rest:

Ask students how much sleep they should be getting and they'll tell you they should have 7 to 8 hours a night. Then ask them how much they are getting, or just look around the classroom at the tired faces in front of you. Our students are working and going to school which takes a toll on their sleep. Every semester I have a few students who work 40 hours a week and are taking 12-15 units. By mid-semester it's no surprise that they're sick. We can only push ourselves so far before it takes a toll on our bodies.

In February, *U.S. News and World Report* published a special report "The State of America's Health in 2009." This "Complete Guide to Health and Wellness" is packed with wonderful information for individuals of all ages. One of the articles "Lights Out! It's Time for Bed" by Sarah Baldauf identifies 10 reasons to avoid skimping on sleep. Here are a few:

1. People who get less than seven hours a sleep a night tend to be more obese. That's a no brainer. If you're awake more, you eat more.
2. People (especially women) who don't get enough sleep tend to make bad food choices.
3. People getting fewer than 5 hours of sleep a night were 2.5 times as likely to be diabetic. Those getting 6 or fewer hours were 1.7 times more likely to be diabetic.
4. People of all ages who don't get enough sleep are more prone to depression, mental stress, and lower self-esteem.

I think the goal to set is "good enough." Perfection with regard to nutrition, physical fitness, and rest is really tough to reach. Find moments in your day to get some exercise whether it's at the beginning, middle, end or even throughout it. Park farther away so you walk more. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Know your limits when it comes to sleep by knowing when you aren't getting enough and adjusting back to an adequate level of rest. Add naps into your routine, if you need to. Track your eating habits for a week so you can assess your current diet and use the My Pyramid website to assist you in making healthy changes. Go for smaller, more nutrient dense portions. Eat more fruits and vegetables and less refined, processed foods. Get your friends and family involved too. The results will be a happier, healthier you.