



Hi graduate friends,

Let's talk about food choices today! I often hear and see graduate students grapple with food-related issues throughout their academic journeys. Apart from the fact that making meals and ensuring you have snacks are time-consuming, some other common worries are about what groceries to buy, what to cook, what food/snacks to take to or buy on campus, and more.

I don't have the answers, unfortunately! But I want to tell you about some research that could be helpful. Studies show that healthy eating habits improve students' academic performance (E.g., Khan et al., 2022), and not surprisingly there are also studies that show things like fast food are linked to lower academic performance (E.g., Reuter et al., 2021). Your brain is in your body, and a healthier body means a healthier brain. So, from a learning perspective (and so many other perspectives?!), it's important to eat healthy regularly. But even if you know that healthy eating is important, and even if you know what food and snacks are healthy, research shows that it doesn't necessarily mean you will choose the healthier options when it's time to eat (McArthur et al., 2017). In fact, after a study session, it's possible that you may even purposefully go for the unhealthier option! In 1999, there was a study (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999) published in which a group of students were each given a number to memorize. Some numbers were only 2 digits



while others were 7 digits. After they did the brain work, students were asked to pick a snack and those who had memorized a 7-digit number opted for cake over fruit much more than those who memorized a 2-digit number did. This shows that if you've used a lot of brain power (also known as experiencing cognitive overload), you're much more likely to make decisions that make you feel good on the spot and require less thinking and planning. This is actually also why many grocery store layouts start with fruits and leave unhealthier snacks for you to buy near the end of the store when you're tired and have less will power (Meyersohn, 2022).

So, now you know how your brain works. One way to help yourself is to plan ahead as much as you can. If you don't take any snacks with you, after a study session, you might go buy a brownie, but if you have an apple with you, you may consider eating that instead (even if you don't enjoy it much). You can also try to avoid grocery shopping after a long day of work. If you must, keep in mind that you're going to be more likely to make not-so-good choices, and let this information help you monitor yourself better. As I said, I know that time is one of the big inhibiting factors here, so just be mindful of how your brain works, and do as much as you can to help your body help your brain 😊

Best,



Najmeh Keyhani (she/her/hers), PhD, from your [Learning Development & Success team!](#)

Reference:

Khan, S. I., Zada, R., & Ismael, D. S. (2022). Effect of healthy eating habits on the academic performance of graduating students. *Asia Pacific Journal of Health Management, 17*(2), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.24083/apjhm.v17i2.1469>

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