

PSH offers much for a healthy lifestyle

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Grilled chicken on a bed of lettuce or chicken fingers and fries, 30 minutes of exercise or 30 minutes chatting at Biscotti's, time management or coffee and cramming. Physical and mental health rely upon the choices we make, and Penn State Harrisburg students have available an array of healthy options on campus to get in shape.

"Now there are so many different choices, like salads and fruit. You really do have a choice and it is possible to eat healthy," said Julie Stoehr, PSH's coordinator of intramural sports, fitness, and recreation.

"I think college students today are more fortunate. When I was in college all of the food was very high in starch," Stoehr said.

"If college students can really focus on their health, it will pay off many times," said she said, "in their grades, in their work, in helping them to maintain a focus. If you're not healthy, you're just not going to be successful in all of those areas." Stoehr believes both physical and mental health are equally important and feed off each other.

"First of all, you need to make sure you're getting enough sleep. When you sleep your muscle size grows and that's when your body repairs itself."

Proper nutrition and hydration are also important, Stoehr said.

"Students should really concentrate on getting fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and not sabotaging their bodies with junk food, alcohol, and tobacco," she said.

"Another important thing is hydration, to flush the system," Stoehr said. Drinking six to eight glasses of water a day will help to flush any toxins one's body may be harboring.

The Capital Union Building offers choices of exercise, including lifting weights, using exercise machines, playing basketball, volleyball, badminton, indoor soccer, and racquetball, doing aerobics, Pilates, and Tae-Bo videotapes in the multipurpose room, and using exercise equipment such as exercise balls and bands.

In order to expand choices there often needs to be changes.

"I'm trying to make the weight room and fitness room more female friendly. Now that we have more students on campus, we're looking into possibly extending the weekend hours too,"

Stoehr said.

By female friendly Stoehr means getting equipment that is less cumbersome to use than the weight machines currently in the weight room. "We're always looking to keep current and updated as far as the equipment goes," Stoehr said, "and I'd like to bring in some new programs."

Sometimes it is difficult to find the motivation to make a healthy choice over an unhealthy one, but Stoehr has some motivational tips.

"A really great motivator is to keep track of everything you eat and your weight loss," Stoehr said. "It allows you to realize, 'wow, I don't really eat a good breakfast, no wonder I don't feel good or can't study at night.'"

Getting connected with a buddy system and making a commitment to work out with someone else, doing exercise one finds enjoyable, and competing are also great motivators.

"This kid right here," said Scott Trout, Civil Engineering, pointing to his workout buddy when asked what motivates him to work out. "He's my lifting buddy."

When it comes to getting healthy, Amy Feyma, PSH's Aquatic Coordinator, offers three simple suggestions.

"Get sleep. It affects you mentally, not just physically," Feyma said. "Eat a balanced diet and exercise regularly," she added. "I was once a student myself, so I know."

Students tend to go to bed at unconventional hours, so exercise is a great way to develop healthier sleeping patterns, Feyma said.

Exercise also helps with time management because it encourages students to prioritize.

For example, planning when you're going to study and when you're going to exercise really helps, said Feyma.

Sometimes people must look within themselves to find the motivation to exercise.

"No matter how much I don't want to work out today, once I'm done I know I will feel so much better," Feyma said, "That's what motivates me."

"Looking good physically and knowing that you're doing something good for your body boosts your self esteem," Feyma said.

Feyma said that PSH's Aquatic Center, located in the CUB, is a great resource for getting healthy, but most PSH students don't make use of it.

"Swimming is a good form of exercise, so give it a try," Feyma said. "If you don't

know how to swim, there are swimming lessons."

Students can use the center to swim laps, use the different equipment offered, or just take a break from their studies during open swim time.

"Open and lap swim are open to students," Feyma said. "They can just come in and float or throw on the ball and play water basketball."

"Swimming laps promotes cardiovascular health," said Feyma, who will describe the different strokes to inquiring students.

The equipment, which includes water-aerobics equipment, lap swimming equipment, kickboards, pull buoys, and flippers, is also good for a cardiovascular workout.

Organized programs include low to high impact water aerobics, active older adult water aerobics, and PSH's swim team practice.

The high impact class, which is an invigorating aerobic exercise class with up to 40 minutes of cardiovascular training, promotes strength, flexibility, and good muscle tone.

The low impact class, which involves 40 minutes of low intensity cardiovascular training, improves strength and flexibility.

The new 6-week session for these programs started on October 30, 2005. To register call 948-6740 or stop by the aquatic center, which is open from 6:00 a.m.-10:30 p.m., Monday-Friday and 9:00 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Saturday and Sunday.

"I swim a good bit. It's a relaxing way to work out," said Computer Science major Andrew Myers. "I get bored lifting weights."

"I find that it's a great stress relief," said Feyma, who believes exercise is also important and beneficial for mental health.

"It helps you learn how to peacefully release stressful events of the day. It's mentally relaxing," she added.

"You can become introverted in exercise. I've come up with some really good ideas while exercising, while running."

As the semester wears on, there are students who are so busy with families, jobs, and difficult curriculums it affects their mental and physical health said Linda Meishy, staff psychologist at PSH.

"With a lot of students, I basically have to work with them to not work so hard, to put some balance into their lives, to exercise, because if we're under too much stress, it

comes out somewhere," Meishy said. "That's when we get a cold, I see a lot of upper respiratory types of infections, that sort of thing. One person might get depressed, the next person will have eating disorder issues, or migraine headaches."

"We each have our own vulnerable areas, and in fact we can use that as a guideline," Meishy said. "If you're getting a cold that you can't get rid of, or frequent colds, or more frequent headaches, stomachaches or whatever your symptoms tend to be, that's a good sign you're under too much stress, and that might be a time that you would come and see a counselor."

If it's an urgent situation or an emergency, they try to see students right away. There are two full-time psychologists and two doctoral level practicum students on staff with the counseling services at the student assistance center, which is open from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm, Monday through Thursday, and from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm on Friday.

Depression and anxiety are very common mental health problems among the students seen during counseling at PSH, and this is true in the general population too. College students are also affected by eating disorders and drug and alcohol issues Meishy added.

"Have someone you can be honest with, somebody you can talk to," Meishy suggested as one way to stay mentally healthy. She suggests family, friends, professional counseling, or spiritual support.

"We all need emotional and social support," Meishy added.

Exercise, eating right, and recreation are important for good mental and physical health too said Meishy.

Non-packaged foods, natural foods, fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods are more difficult for students to get hold of when they are "on the go," but with some preplanning it can be done, she said.

"There are healthy choices that can be made, and you benefit from that," said Meishy. "You have more energy because you're getting the protein that you need and you're not overloading on the fats and so on."

Exercise is a bonus because it not only makes your body fit, but it releases endorphins and lifts your mood, Meishy said.

"Research has shown, in mild to moderate depression,

that exercise can work as well as some medications can," said Meishy.

Although people tend to feel better when they exercise and eat healthily, Meishy often hears from students they don't have enough time to fit them in.

"You can't afford to not exercise or eat well," said Meishy, "because the pay off then allows you to do the other things that you think are standing in the way of eating well and exercising. So it's sort of a catch 22."

You can not only manage eating well and exercising into your daily schedule, valuable recreation time can be fit in as well, said Meishy.

"People will come to me for time management, and what I try to help them look at is how to balance everything so that when you are studying it's more effective," said Meishy. "People often are going to take the time for computer games or TV or hanging out with their friends, but mentally they're still studying, or they're worrying about studying."

"If you have a system for managing your time, then you know when you're supposed to be studying or how many hours a day you need to be studying," said Meishy.

"Being a student is highly stressful. You could potentially be working around the clock, so you've got to find a way to take a mental break or again it's going to come out in some part of your health," she added.

"I think in the food service area, we try and educate students about healthy eating habits and trying to progress in their studies as well as in their lifestyle on campus," says JoAnn Coleman, PSH director of housing and food services.

"We do offer a lot of healthy alternatives, but we still have students that want burgers and fried chicken. Chicken tenders are one of our most popular items," Coleman said. "So the customer has the option, it's just what they select," she added.

Healthy choices do exist, such as plain chicken breast, grilled turkey pitas, and salads.

"We try to vary that as far as educating, as far as nutrition, and as far as international flavors," said Coleman.

At least one or two salads a week are featured in the display cooking area, low-fat soups are offered, and there are different wraps, fruits, low-fat yogurts, multi-grain breads, and whole

wheat breads available.

Students can also get a salad in the place of French fries as part of the combo meal, with no additional charge, said Coleman.

"We've been looking to get a great variety of salads out in the future," Coleman said. "We looked at some steak and some Asian chicken salads."

Coleman believes when it comes to staying nutritionally healthy, it is important to look at more than just the fat content on nutrition labels.

"Students especially look to see if food is low-fat, but they don't look for other things like sodium. We have some products that are baked and low in fat, but they are a lot higher in sodium," Coleman said. "There is a misconception there."

Even if you're looking at pizza, it is nutritional to a degree, as long as you're not getting the meat lovers version," smiles Coleman. "If you're getting the vegetarian, you're getting some vegetables and bread into your diet."

"We do have a suggestion box, and if students put legitimate suggestions in we're willing to look at them," Coleman said. "We respond to the questions on our new memo board located outside the office. Or, they could stop and see one of us here."

Julie Stoehr's suggested "how to get healthy/motivational" websites:

<http://www.about.com/health>
This covers lots of areas of health and fitness.

<http://medlineplus.gov/>
This also covers many areas of health

<http://209.48.219.53/>
This is an "interactive healthy eating index"

<http://www.calorieking.com>
This is a food/calorie database

<http://www.caloriesperhour.com>
This offers specific calories consumed and calories burned calculators as well as other information

<http://www.healthstatus.com>
This offers health assessments and calculators

<http://nat.crgq.com>
This is a very thorough Nutrition Analysis Tool System

Case of winter blues can be serious

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This time of year often brings sadness about in many people. All of a sudden, darker hours arrive earlier than in the summer months and this change in time brings about an emotional change in many people. These feelings are now being linked to seasonal depression or SAD for Seasonal Affective Disorder. With the recent time change it is important to not be left in the dark about SAD.

SAD is a real problem for about 4-6% of Americans and up to 20% of the American population experience it in a lesser form. Three-quarters of the sufferers are women, most of who are between the ages of 20-40. Though SAD is most common during these ages, it can also occur in children and adolescents. Also, this illness is more commonly seen in people who live at high latitudes, where seasonal changes are more extreme.

According to www.clevelandclinic.org, SAD is "a depression that occurs each year at the same time, usually starting in fall or

winter and ending in spring or early summer. It is more than just 'the winter blues' or 'cabin fever.' A rare form of SAD known as 'summer depression' begins in late spring or early summer and ends in fall."

The exact cause of this condition is not known, but there are two theories that are currently accepted in understanding the cause of SAD. The first theory is that the lack of direct sunlight in winter causes the disorder. The prior website notes that the influence of latitude on SAD strongly suggests that it is caused by changes in the availability of sunlight. The biological clock that regulates mood, sleep and hormones are delayed, thus causing people to move more slowly and become blue. Studies show that exposure to light, such as tanning lights, may reset the biological clock.

The second theory is that brain chemicals transmitting information between nerves, called neurotransmitters, may be altered or imbalanced in individuals with SAD. Just as with the first theory, it is suggested that exposure to light or sunlamps may help correct this imbalance

or anti-depression medications may help in treatment of the disorder.



Photo courtesy of Google Images

The sun, or lack thereof, is the main culprit for seasonal depression.

How do you know if your symptoms are related to SAD? If symptoms include fatigue, weight gain, increase in appetite, difficulty concentrating, and the increased desire to be alone, it may be time to consult a physician or psychologist. Since some of these symptoms are also the same as chronic depression, it is

important to monitor to see what pattern exists with emotions.

At Penn State Harrisburg, Steve Backels, director of counseling,

office that have SAD, but I do see a few each year. What I've found is people who buy full-spectrum fluorescent lights and engage in light therapy are almost always helped."

There are a few ways to prevent the onset of SAD and prevent it from returning if you have already been diagnosed with the disorder. These ways include trying to spend time outside every day, beginning to seek the use of artificial lights upon the onset of low sunlight, eating a well-balanced diet which includes a variety of vitamins and minerals, and exercising for at least 20 minutes a day, three times a week. It is also recommended to stay involved with your social circle and regular activities, as they are a great means of support during winter months. Also, certain individuals may need professional counseling in the winter months.

If you recognize any of the symptoms, talk to a friend or family member. Counselors Steve Backels and Linda Meashey in W-117 of the Olmsted Building also offer professional guidance at Penn State Harrisburg.

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Counseling Services

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Please note there is
also a crisis hotline,
you can get the
number from the
Student Assistance
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