**What is Eating?**

* Taking something in through the mouth as food: ingesting, chewing, and swallowing
* Think of eating like putting fuel in a car – Your body needs fuel for energy.
* What do you think “Grow Foods” are?
* What do you think “Fun Foods” are?
* What does eating mean to you?

**Why Is Nutrition Important?**

* Your mood, behavior and brain function are affected by what you eat.
* When hungry, you may feel irritable and restless.
* When full, you may feel calm and satisfied.
* If you eat less food or more food than you need over a long period of time, it can affect your physical and mental health.

**Discussion**

* What are you like when you are hungry?
* How do you feel when you haven’t eaten all day?
* How do you feel when you are full?
* How do you feel when you overeat?
* It is helpful to be very aware of your body’s hunger and fullness. Listen to those body cues - It can help keep you at a healthy weight, and keep your mood more stable.

**Effects of Poor Nutrition**

* Thinking is less clear, and you may feel:
* Irritable, unable to focus, with decreased ability to listen or understand
* Cold, tired, low on energy
* Distressed by nausea or headaches
* Unable to function as well in school or work, or unable to keep up - (The brain of a child or teen with an eating disorder may not develop as it should)
* When nutrition is poor, you tend to get sick easier

**Nutrition Helps Your Brain**

* Your brain needs a lot of nutrition and energy to keep brain chemicals and nerves functioning well.
* Those neurotransmitters influence mood, sleep patterns and thinking.
* If you don’t have enough vitamins or minerals, there can be damage to nerves in the brain that affect memory, limit problem-solving ability, and brain function.

**Nutrition Gives You Energy**

* Energy “calories” come from the carbohydrate, protein and fat found in foods and beverages.
* The human brain is very active and uses about 20 – 30% of a person’s energy intake at rest.
* When the calories eaten don’t meet the energy needed, there will be changes in how your brain functions, when under- nourished.
* That’s why skipping breakfast is an unhealthy habit.

**Nutrition Helps Your Body**

* When you are hungry, your body has less energy and motivation.
* The body responds to long-term hunger by shutting down or slowing down some of the body’s function, changing activity levels, hormones, oxygen and how the nutrients get to your body’s cells.
* Low energy can make it harder to fight infection.

**Optional Learning Activity**

* Ask a volunteer to write their usual daily eating routine on the white board and discuss healthy or unhealthy habits, making suggestions for the diet on the board.
* Offer a Daily Food Chart if group members want to keep track of their own nutrition after group (recommend discussing it later with their nurse or dietician) <http://www.projectparticipate.org/Handouts/FoodChecklist.PDF>
* Ask yourself, are you eating balanced meals?

**Harvard Food Pyramid** (Use Healthy Eating Pyramid handout or websites below.)

Copyright © 2008 Harvard University.  For more information about The Healthy Eating Pyramid, please see The Nutrition Source, Department of Nutrition, Harvard School of Public Health, http://www.thenutritionsource.org, and Eat, Drink, and Be Healthy, by Walter C. Willett, M.D. and Patrick J. Skerrett (2005), Free Press/Simon & Schuster Inc.

See further description of the Healthy Eating Pyramid at <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/pyramid/index.html>

From <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/12/Harvard_food_pyramid.png>

**Tips for Healthy Eating**

* Start with activity and movement.
* Eat plant-based foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains and healthy oils.
* Cut down on red meats, refined grains, potatoes, sugary drinks or baked goods, and salty or processed foods – Eat healthier foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grain breads and pasta, fish and poultry.
* Take a multivitamin if recommended by your healthcare provider.
* Use alcohol only in moderation.
* Be mindful – Focus on physical signs of hunger and fullness.

**Discussion: Why Should You Focus on Diet and Nutrition?**

* Awareness can help you make and maintain changes in your eating habits.
* Education may be needed if a person needs a special diet or to avoid food interactions with drugs (For example, limiting caffeine because of medications).
* Awareness can lead to help for people with eating disorders or chemical dependencies.
* Support can be helpful if the medication used to treat psychiatric illness can cause weight gain or loss.

**Why Do People Eat When They Are Not Hungry?**

* When they are bored or tired
* When situations or moods “trigger” going to food for comfort
* Emotional eating can lead to obesity or poor health from unhealthy food choices - Seeking counseling may be helpful.

**What Is Emotional Eating?**

* Eating for comfort, or in response to emotions, rather than for hunger
* There are some skills you can learn to decrease the emotional “pull” of food. (See Emotional Eating Handout.)
* Moods, stress, and related “triggers” include feeling a loss of control or vague feelings of anxiety.
* Negative emotions can lead to eating too much (as with binge eating disorder).
* Sometimes anxiety and depression can lead to poor appetite and not eating enough - Nutrition supplements may be needed.

**Recognize Your “Triggers”**

* Situations or relationships can cause stress and anxiety that “triggers” thoughts and behaviors of emotional eating.
* Avoiding the triggers during recovery can be helpful, but that is not always possible.
* Finding support and using coping and relaxation skills can be helpful for the times when anxiety increases.
* What “triggers” do you have for unhealthy eating behaviors?
* What could be done to avoid them or to cope with them?

Discuss Mindful Eating - Refer to page 2 of Emotional Eating Handout

**Make Healthier Food Choices**

* Make small, slow changes instead of trying to make large, fast changes.
* Keep track of what you eat and drink each day, so you can tell which food groups you need to eat more of.
* Consider asking for help from a dietician, especially if you have an illness or problem that needs a special diet.
* Check with your health care provider before following a new diet or exercise program.
* Eat a variety of foods for meals and snacks.

**Choose to Make One of These Changes:**

* Instead of frying meat, try baking, grilling or broiling. Take the skin off before eating chicken or turkey.
* Eat grilled, broiled or baked fish at least once a week.
* Use low or nonfat versions of butter, sour cream, mayonnaise or salad dressings.
* Eat fruits and vegetables with each meal and as snacks.
* Watch out for “hidden” fats, especially when going out to eat.
* Drink more water. Use small amounts of unsweetened tea or diet soda pop instead of sugary drinks.
* Walk more - Get more activity and exercise.

**Discussion:**

*How can you make sure to eat breakfast in the morning?*

*Name a healthy food that you don’t get enough of. How can you eat more?*

*How can you cut back on regular soda and juice to help control weight?*

*Name something healthy you could order for fast food.*

*Name a new food you have tried recently. How did you like it?*

*How can I eat healthier to improve my health?*

*What is one thing I can do to improve my eating habits.*

*What does healthy eating mean to you?*

Other References:

Fundukian, L.J. & Wilson, J. (2007). Gale Encyclopedia of Mental Health. 2nd ed. p. 785-791.

Discussion Questions adapted from information provided by Spring Harbor Hospital in Westbrook, Maine. (2006).