

PROVIDING NUTRITION FOR LEARNERS

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There is scientific proof to substantiate the saying, "breakfast is the most important meal of the day." Starting in childhood, many people are taught the importance of eating a balanced diet made up of the major food groups. They are also often warned of the results of using or abusing drugs, alcohol and caffeine. Even so, these early lessons are often overlooked or ignored when trainers plan their sessions.

To make sure that you and your learners operate at peak potential and that effective learning occurs, you should consider various factors related to nutrition as you prepare your sessions. Here are four important points to remember related to learners and food:

1. Many trainers provide food and refreshments in the morning, at lunchtime and for breaks. This is a great idea as long as you provide the right foods, include variety and provide ample breaks so that learners can take advantage of whatever you provide.
2. Since there are a lot of people who fail to eat breakfast, providing food when participants arrive can be beneficial for them and you. Studies show that the brain needs complex carbohydrates found in fruits, grains, cereals and breads to effectively function. To assist in fulfilling this need, you might want to ensure that a variety of non-sweet as well as sweet items are offered (e.g. muffins, croissants and bagels) along with fresh fruit. Simply offering donuts and other sweet pastries often overload learners with simple carbohydrates (e.g. sugar) that provide a spike, then a letdown as energy levels subside. On the other hand, if you want to provide a quick stimulant and pump up sugar and performance levels for an activity or task, consider providing candy, cookies, brownies or other sweet treats.
3. If you are providing lunch, consider what you will serve carefully. Keep the meal light and healthy and ensure that you provide proteins in the form of fish, shrimp, or chicken instead of heavier red meats. Avoid turkey since it has a natural chemical called L-tryptophan that acts as a sedative and relaxes participants after lunch. Also, provide a variety of fresh vegetables and fruits.
4. In mid-afternoon, you may want to replenish nutrition levels by providing complex carbohydrates, such as, fruit, juices or grains. If you supply sweets, make sure that you also provide non-sweet alternatives. Also, if you provide popcorn or other snack foods, take it easy on salts and oils.

The key to nutritionally stimulating the brain is to plan ahead and make sure you think about the diverse needs of all your learners.

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