

## Healthy Eating Tips for SRNAs



By Eric Swanlund, II, BSN  
Student Representative,  
AANA Health & Wellness  
Committee



LCDR Tiffany Uranga,  
DNP, CRNA, NC, USN  
Chair AANA Health & Wellness  
Committee

**A**s a student registered nurse anesthetist (SRNA) immersed in school, I understand the time limitations and financial challenges of maintaining a healthy nutrition plan. Academia comes first, and everything else gets tiered below. Anesthesia training is a stressful time, and it's too easy to cope by reaching for comfort foods. However, most consoling foods consist primarily of processed simple carbohydrates, which are pro-inflammatory and potentiate the stress response.

Good nutrition starts with smart choices, and eating healthy starts with commitment. Good nutrition provides the foundation to perform better and gives the mind and body a fighting chance against overwhelming academic pressures. Unfortunately, the standard American diet (SAD) is full of unhealthy food. Healthy choices are usually not the most convenient, but, fortunately, they can be inexpensive with proper planning. Here are some tips to help stay on track, eat healthier, and reduce stress.

### 1. Cut Down or Cut Out Soda and Excessive Caffeine

It is amazing how many empty calories you can eliminate by removing soda from your diet. About 50.6 percent of Americans indulge in at least one sugar-sweetened beverage per day.<sup>1</sup> The 2015-2020 American Dietary Guidelines recommend keeping total caloric intake from added sugar to 10 percent to mitigate the adverse effects of comorbidities such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.<sup>1</sup> Many students build a tolerance to caffeine and/or use soda or sugary energy drinks to satisfy a craving. The stimulant effects of caffeine, in moderation can be beneficial; however, a calorie-free source of caffeine, such as black coffee or tea, is a more health-conscious choice. You can also try adding low- or no-calorie natural sweeteners and skim or low-calorie soy milk. You might be surprised to find that a strong cup of black tea might be just enough to make it through a lengthy morning lecture.

### 2. Cut Out Deep Fried Foods

Americans on average consume 53 percent of our daily total fat intake from added fats and oils, a large portion of which comes from fried foods. Increased saturated fat intake is one of the key dietary contributors to chronic diseases including heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and hypertension. A high-fat diet has also been associated with depression and decreased quality of life.<sup>2</sup> Avoiding fried foods not only cuts down on calories, you'll likely feel better, too.

### 3. Plan Meals

Meal planning starts with a shopping list. Reviewing recipe ingredients in addition to making note of staple items will help to eliminate running back to the store for things you forgot. Also, try and incorporate grocery sale items into the basket. Weekly sale flyers are usually posted near store entrances. A quick glance can lead to easy savings. Preparing meals in large quantities and storing them in small meal-size portions helps to have ready-made healthy choices when time is limited. Using a Crock-Pot in addition to freezer and microwave friendly reusable food storage containers makes nutritious food preparation virtually effortless. Not having to cook during the week saves time and money. This equates to studying more and stressing less.

### 4. Shop the Perimeter of Grocery Stores and Late at Farmers Markets

The perimeter of the grocery store is where fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat, and fish are located. Avoid the center aisle where the processed and packaged foods are shelved. Buy in-season fresh produce or stock up and freeze it for future consumption. Shop farmers markets just before closing when vendors commonly discount their products.

### 5. Embrace Whole Grains and Beans

Whole grain such as rice, quinoa, oatmeal, and beans pack a double punch for nutrient-dense complex carbohydrates and protein. They are inexpensive when purchased in bulk and easy to prepare. Top them with veggies, spices, and low calorie-condiments to create a meal of your own. Whole grains and beans have the added advantage of fiber which helps maintains satiation longer.

►Continued on page 41



Post questions and comments to the **SRNA Health and Wellness Facebook group**



AANA Health and Wellness online resources:  
**AANAWellness.com** and **AANA.com/StudentWellness**

There is also a page dedicated to eating nutritious food at:  
<http://www.aana.com/resources2/health-wellness/Pages/Eating-Nutritious-Foods.aspx>



Questions for the author can be emailed to **swanl012@umn.edu**

### That Humbling Moment

This mission was really a wake-up call for me. I spent one day in the mobile clinic that traveled to the coastal villages outside of Barahona. Serving as a triage nurse, with the help of an interpreter, gave me the opportunity to listen and see the results of local residents' day-to-day struggles. Nurse anesthesia education is difficult, but none of my daily hardships hold a candle to what these families go through. Finding sources of clean water, safe food, or the next meal is something that many of us will never experience; but for them, it's their daily routine. Of course, we all know the saying, "first-world problems," but actually to see how they survive and speak with them really puts "want vs. need" into perspective. The children were 7 years old going on 30—so brave and optimistic. They made the most of what little they had and expressed creativity in whatever way possible to have some fun. Many children took old bike tires and would "walk" them with a stick, everywhere they went.

### New People, Sights, and Adventure

One of the great advantages of this trip was being in the presence of truly inspiring people. From surgeons to nurses to interpreters, each person you met had such a warm heart and a spirit for generosity. College students from the Dominican Republic volunteered their time to translate and show us the ropes around Barahona. Every day, I ran the five-mile trek from the hospital to the hotel with some of the surgical team. Through this, I was really able to get to know the members of the team and received a great tour city of Barahona. When we returned, we all sat down together for dinner to talk about our day, struggles of the differing villages and challenges in the operating room, as well as seemingly small acts of kindness that would dramatically improve the quality of life of the people there.

### Take the Plunge

So, if you are considering volunteering for a mission trip, but wonder how you will have the time or if it is worth the money, let me assure you, it's worth every penny and make-up exam. Speak with your program about how you can get on board. It was by far the best clinical experience in the past two years. This week challenged me more than any other rotation ever has. I returned to my regular clinical sites as a different provider, and I have this experience to thank. Of my graduating class, 18 of 22 have attended or will be attending a surgical mission trip prior to graduation.

### Meet Kenya Relief

One of the organizations that many students in my program have used is Kenya Relief. This organization was founded by a nurse anesthetist, Steve James, CRNA, in memory and testimony of his late daughter, Brittany James. At 16 years old, Brittany decided she wanted to sponsor a young Kenyan boy named Newton. She sponsored Newton for three years and aspired to one day make a trip to Kenya to meet him.<sup>1</sup>

On Sept. 14, 2001, Brittney passed away unexpectedly at the age of 19. Their lives in shambles, her parents decided to do something she would have wanted to do in her memory: meet her sponsored child, and six months later, Steve set out for Kenya to meet Newton.<sup>1</sup>

After contacting a local hospital in Migori, Kenya, Steve decided he would use his gifts as a nurse anesthetist while in Kenya. Wanting to help as much as he could, he also collected as much supplies and equipment and flew it to Kenya.<sup>1</sup> Steve witnessed firsthand the pain and suffering and realized the huge need in Kenya. He knew that this was his calling: to make a change and leave a legacy of hope.<sup>1</sup> ■

Notes: <http://www.kenyarelieff.org/about/legacy>

►Continued from page 38

## Healthy Eating Tips for SRNAs

Committing to healthy food choices fuels successful academic and clinical performance. In addition to busting stress, combining good nutrition with 30-45 minutes of aerobic exercise several times a week can boost creativity, mood, mental stamina, and knowledge retention.<sup>3</sup> Nutritional planning is important to us as future anesthesia providers and patient role models. Healthy habits learned now can not only aid to meet the physical and mental demands of school, but they are likely to stick and become routine in your CRNA practice.

### References

1. Park S, Xu F, Town M, Blanck H. (2016). Prevalence of sugar-sweetened beverage intake among adults: 23 states and district of Columbia, 2013. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Morbidity and mortality weekly report. 65(7).
2. Auano C, Henriquez, P, Bes-Rastrollo, M., Ruis-Canela, M., Lopez del Burgo, C., Sanchez-Villegas, A. (2011). Dietary fat intake and quality of life: The SUN project. Nutrition Journal. 10(121). Retrieved from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3215177/pdf/1475-2891-10-121.pdf>
3. Benfield W. (2016). The effects of aerobic exercise on productivity: A tool to improve academic and clinical performance. American Association of Nurse Anesthetists News Bulletin. Retrieved from <http://www.aana.com/myaana/Publications/aanewsbulletin/Documents/16percent20MarchNBpercent20pppercent20Final.pdf>. ■