**Why People Need To Eat**

People need to eat because their bodies are constantly using the nutrients derived from food.

Some nutrients provide our bodies with energy (calories) whereas other nutrients provide vitamins and minerals that help facilitate metabolic functions. If one did not eat, the body would cease to grow, develop and function normally. If people provide their bodies with optimum nutrition, they grow to their full height potential, function optimally and look and feel their best!

When food is eaten, the digestive tract breaks it down into its most simple form. These nutrients are then absorbed into the blood and taken to all the cells of the body where they are used. The body needs energy and nutrients in small amounts throughout the day to maintain energy and blood sugar levels. The body digests and absorbs nutrients better if provided in small amounts throughout the day, versus in large amounts infrequently.

Eating balanced meals and snacks regularly throughout the day helps:

Supplies the body with a steady and constant source of energy (avoid energy slumps).

Allows the body to function and grow to its optimal potential. If the body is not fed regularly, or fed enough, the body will think it is going into a period of starvation. When the body senses this change, it begins to conserve energy and nutrients. When the body is conserving energy, it will store energy as fat, growth will slow or cease and the metabolic rate will slow down.

**Metabolism**

Metabolism is the rate at which the body uses calories (contained in carbohydrates, protein and fat). The higher the metabolic rate the more calories the body needs. Having a healthy (“fast”) metabolism increases the body’s opportunity to get all the nutrients it needs and decreases the chance of having problems maintaining a healthy weight.

Hunger cues are the body’s way of letting a person know that his or her body needs more calories. A healthy metabolism will cause increased hunger. Feeding the body when it is hungry encourages the metabolic rate to continue burning energy at a fast rate. However, if the body is *not* fed in response to hunger, metabolism will slow down thus decreasing the rate at which it uses energy.

To keep the body’s metabolic rate fast and healthy, it is best to eat in response to hunger cues, and stop eating when one feels satisfied (fullness cues). Eating in response to the body’s hunger and fullness cues will naturally lead to eating smaller more frequent meals.

**Balanced Meals**

Eating small, frequent, balanced meals will provide the body with the variety of nutrients it requires. Providing a variety of nutrients ensures that blood sugar levels will rise slowly and provide the body with sustainable, long-lasting energy. Eating a mixture of nutrients (e.g. carbohydrates, protein, fat) results in increased satiety (stay full longer).

An easy way to ensure the body is getting what it needs is to plan meals and snacks. Meals should contain items from at least three of the four food groups, and snacks should contain items from at least two of the four food groups.

**The Role of Breakfast**

During sleep, the body continues working - but it does slow down. Eating breakfast signals the body that it is time to start using fuel again at an increased rate. Breakfast “triggers” the body’s metabolic rate to speed up.

If breakfast is not eaten, the metabolic rate will remain slow or sluggish throughout the day. A slow metabolic rate interferes with the body’s hunger and fullness cues, which makes it difficult for the body to get all the nutrients it needs during the day. It may also be difficult to make up for the energy and nutrients that come from breakfast if breakfast is skipped on a regular basis. This may cause people to feel less alert, less able to learn and less able to perform.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Nutrients:** Nutrients are chemical substances found in foods that nourish the body by providing energy- building materials and factors to regulate chemical reactions in the body.

**Calories**: Just as a car runs on gas, the human body is fueled by calories. A calorie is a measure of how much energy a nutrient supplies to the body. The technical definition of one calorie is “the amount of heat required at a pressure of one atmosphere to raise the temperature of one gram of water one degree Celsius”.