

# TWU Counseling Center

## Stress and Health, Nutrition and Exercise

A surprising amount of the stress we may experience on a daily basis can be caused by the chemicals we consume. By eating or drinking certain things we can actually put our bodies under chemical stress. Similarly, if we are eating an unbalanced diet we may be stressing our bodies by depriving them of essential nutrients. Eating too much for a long period causes obesity. This puts your heart and lungs under stress, overloads your organs and reduces stamina. You should be aware of the effects of the following:

- **Caffeine:**  
Caffeine is a stimulant. One of the reasons you probably drink it is to raise your level of arousal (i.e. stress). If you are drinking many cups of coffee a day, then you may find that you can reduce a lot of stress by switching to good decaffeinated coffee for a portion of your daily intake.
- **Alcohol:**  
In small amounts alcohol may help you relax. In larger amounts it may increase stress as it disrupts sleep (and causes hangovers!). In large amounts over a long term alcohol will damage your body.
- **Nicotine:**  
While in the very short term nicotine can cause relaxation, its toxic effects raise the heart rate and stress the body. If you smoke, try taking your pulse before and after a cigarette, and notice the difference. After the initial period of giving up smoking, most ex-smokers report feeling much more relaxed on a general basis. If you are ready to give up smoking, then an excellent book to read is Alan Carr's 'Easy Way to Give Up Smoking'.
- **Sugar:**  
Sugar-rich foods can raise energy in the short term. The problem with this is that your body copes with high levels of sugar by secreting insulin, which reduces the amount of sugar in your blood stream. Insulin can persist and continue acting after it has normalized levels of blood sugar. This can cause an energy dip.

If you eat a good, well-balanced diet then you should be able to minimize this sort of chemical stress. Your body will be receiving all the nutrients it requires to function effectively. You will normally be able to get reliable information on diet from your doctor or the student health center.

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**TWU**  
**Counseling Center**  
**Locations:**

*Denton*  
*West Jones Hall*  
940-898-3801

*Dallas-Parkland*  
*FPH 120*  
214-689-6655

*Dallas-Presbyterian*  
*DPB 16*  
214-706-2416

*Houston*  
*Suite 2250*  
713-794-2059