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Written by Victoria Dolby Toews, M.P.H.

**Healthy college care packages are a "hug" from home.**

Motivational speaker and heart-disease survivor Mellanie True Hills wasn't deterred from encouraging healthy choices for her son just because he was going away to college. Instead, the author of *A Woman's Guide to Saving Her Own Life* (Healthy Ideas Press, 2005) and her husband shifted their efforts from the family kitchen to the post office—sending off wholesome items in care packages bound for the University of North Texas, in Denton. If your child is among the 2 million high school grads heading off to college this fall, why not send a "hug" from home in the form of a healthy care package.

**Nourishing Nibbles**

Living away from home presents many challenges to young adults out on their own for the first time; for those living on campus, the dining hall generally ranks as one of the biggest nutritional minefields. San Francisco-based nutritionist and food/lifestyle coach Rania Batayneh, M.P.H., agrees that wholesome food can be harder to find on campus than it was in Mom's kitchen. She recommends snack bars as one of the best items to tuck into a college-bound package.

Check the label when choosing breakfast bars for your coed, suggests Batayneh, who says you should look for one "with at least 5 grams of fiber and made with whole grains to fuel your student's body and brain for a long, hard day of classes." Protein bars also fill the bill as a handy snack; she recommends one with "a close ratio of protein to sugar grams and about 200 calories."

"Dorm vending machines are full of high-fat, high-salt choices that are very unhealthy and pack on the pounds. Some still contain trans fats, too," notes Hills. "Sodas, which studies link to the development of diabetes, certainly flow freely on campus."

What's a parent to do? Send yummy but healthy snacks, of course. Some of Hills' (and her son's) favorite mailable treats include the following.

- Dried fruits (cranberries, blueberries, raisins)
- Nuts (walnuts, almonds, pecans)
- Granola bars
- Organic, trans fat-free crackers
- Low-fat cookies

To take the place of sodas, Batayneh suggests sending flavor packets that students can add to their water bottles; some of these (such as Airborne On-The-Go) can even be used to bolster immunity and fight off a cold. "Obviously, bottled water is much too heavy to ship," concedes Hills, but one of her son's care packages did include a faucet-mounted water filter for his dorm sink, which kept her son well-hydrated.

How about tossing in some tea bags, suggests Cathy Margolin, an acupuncturist and nutritionist in private practice in Los Angeles. "Green teas and black teas are sold in every possible flavor for a little caffeine boost. College kids are buying it at Starbucks anyway, so why not have it in their dorm rooms?"

With parents not around to nag about veggies, chances are your college-age kid (even with a snack-packed care package) doesn't have the perfect diet. Including a multivitamin/mineral in your care package can help fill in the gaps. If you want to take it a bit farther, throw in a bottle of vitamin C. "It's the best overall bang for your buck to keep the immune system in tip-top shape," says Margolin. Being realistic about the college years, she adds, "It even helps combat the negative effects of alcohol consumption."

**Refresh and Relax**

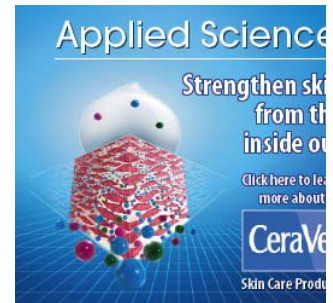
Quality sleep is not only necessary for stress management and overall health, it is also the time when freshly learned information cements into memory, notes Debbie Mandel, M.A., author of *Addicted to Stress* (Jossey-Bass, 2008). Yet sleep seems in short supply on most dorm floors. If noisy neighbors interfere with sleep time, Mandel suggests sending your child earplugs or a relaxation CD.

Exercise serves as another powerful stress reducer. Batayneh encourages college students to stick with their exercise programs, and parents can help by sending a gym membership or perhaps even a few sessions with a personal trainer. "You could even go in with another parent on a training package," she says.

**An Ounce of "Personal Care" Prevention**

With an eye-care office across the street from St. Petersburg College in Clearwater, Fla., for the past 19 years, Scott P. Drexler, O.D., has certainly seen his fair share of college students. "Late in the first semester (October, November and early December), we see the rate of contact lens-related infections nearly double," says Drexler. Typically, students wear their contact lenses too long, or they fail to follow the recommended disinfection regimen, he explains. Sending along plenty of solutions, spare cases and spare lenses can greatly reduce these vision-threatening problems.

"Toothbrushes should be replaced every three months to remain effective," notes Catrise Austin, D.D.S., owner of VIP Smiles cosmetic/general dentist practice in New York City. These lightweight items are a great toss-in for any care package. "Don't forget the floss," she adds.



At the end of the day, it might not matter so much what's in the box, but the fact that your student got a package from home.

**Quick Tip**

Earplugs filter out the noise, when dorm sounds interfere with studies and sleep.

\* **Parents:** Cut out this "Dining Hall Navigation Guide" and pop it in your next care package.

**Dining Hall Navigation Guide**

A big adjustment for many incoming freshmen tends to be the lack of home-cooked meals ("freshmen 15" anyone?). If you know what to look for, healthy foods are available in college cafeterias, and on-campus eateries are offering healthier choices all the time. The following tips can help you steer a healthier course through the cafeteria line.

- ◆ Take advantage of the salad bar: Pile on the leafy greens and other veggies, but take it easy with the cheeses, croutons and bacon bits. With dressings, either keep an eye on portion size or go for the low-fat choices.
- ◆ Drink right: Ditch the soda, and choose water or nutrient-rich beverages such as nonfat milk or 100% fruit juice instead.
- ◆ Dabble in vegetarianism: Whether or not you're a vegetarian, take advantage of the vegetarian entree options—they are often lower in fat, and higher in fiber and other healthful nutrients.
- ◆ Enjoy the bounty of fruit: Grab a piece of fruit every day: it's a great between-meal snack, or after-dinner treat in place of cakes, cookies and ice cream. Also, use fruit to increase the nutrition of your meals, such as by slicing a banana into a bowl of cereal, or by eating fresh strawberries with yogurt.
- ◆ Whole grains = wholesome: Whenever possible, go for the whole-grain versions of bread, cereal, pasta and tortillas to instantly improve the nutrient content of your meal.
- ◆ Get in, and get out: Most dining halls are like an endless buffet. If you hang out too long in the cafeteria, you may end up eating much more than your body needs.