

Your food, your life . . . your choice

An interview with UW's nutritional consultant Linda Barton

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At this University there's a lot of choice offered in terms of what you can eat. The thing is, it ultimately comes down to what you select — the choice you make. Food services can provide the healthiest food possible for you, but if you choose to grab a donut and coffee from Tim Horton's every morning for breakfast . . . well, it's your choice.

One person who's had a role in ensuring that healthy choices are available to you is Linda Barton. In her position as consulting dietician with the school, Barton sees one of her goals as raising students' awareness and education regarding the food they're using as their body's building blocks.

"Because actually, I think people aren't thinking at all about what they're eating . . . and something so important as the fuel you're putting in your body, you don't even think about it? It's on the shelf because some company wanted to make money, and you're eating it? . . . like, just wake up. Whatever choice suits you, but *make a choice*."

educated nutritional decisions, and doing nutritional consulting and seminar work with various departments of the University — Food Services, Health Services, Residence Life, and Athletics.

She sits on the Food Advisory Board, a committee that meets every two weeks to deal with issues around food planning and delivery through Food Services, "but Health Services pays for my seat there . . . I think it's a nice way to be in the meeting with Food Services."

She is involved in the planning done to determine what foods are offered by Food Services, as well as getting the message out to students. She has been part of the behind-the-

Toronto. But she also feels that the vegetarian choices are often bypassed by students, "cause they look at it and think, what's in that — they're suspect."

There've been a lot of changes over the past few years and they've been well received by students. Barton receives feedback through comment cards and at the seminars she presents: "it used to be very negative material — you're doing this wrong, we hate this — but now it's good material . . . the students were really upset, they didn't like the poor choice . . . now I am not hearing any of that."

By popular request, Barton is currently working on a nutritional information project to let students know the nutrient composition of the food they eat. Individual food fact cards are being introduced to replace the existing nutritional brochures which contains information on a wide selection of menu items.

One concern Barton has is the lack of fibre in students' diets — "I see that there's too little fibre in the cafeteria food and this is a common fact — many young people are not eating enough fibre — it's not a UW fact . . . but I'd like to see UW do an excellent job of providing students with choices with more fibre."

But the onus is not only on Food Services. "It's to do with the fact that students want high fat food. That's what they want, that's what they were programmed to eat."

Other primary messages that Barton is trying to find some space in students' heads for, include following the 1-2-3 Energy strategy, getting the timing right on eating, and including snacks ("mini-meals") into daily eating patterns.

1-2-3 Energy is a simplified way of remembering to eat a balanced meal. One, for vegetables and fruit, which provide about an hours worth of energy. Two, for grains, that deliver two hours worth. Three, for protein, energy which will last three hours.

The idea is, every time you eat, eat for energy and include each of the three foods in your meal / snack to keep you going until your next

One culinary choice offered to Villagers comes from Commensal, a company that makes vegetarian dishes for five-star restaurants in Toronto and Montreal.

"It's really my job to provide information to you that's accurate, teach you how to get more, and encourage you to think about what your *choice* is — what *your* choice is. I don't like telling people that meat is no good, or milk is better than soy. I don't like to tell people that. I like to tell them the facts about milk, the facts about soy, and encourage them to make a choice."

Barton's role at the university is two-fold: helping students to make

scenes work over the past few years in making changes to the food available to students on campus.

"Food Services, I still think, does not do a good job marketing their product to campus . . . There've been changes, so it's too bad people don't know more about it." One change she identifies is the introduction of good vegetarian selections provided by Commensal, a company that also provides food for some five-star vegetarian restaurants in Montreal and

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nourishment.

This relates to Barton's second emphasis, getting your timing right. Try for every three or four hours. "Extremely hungry people binge." Instead, you "should be looking looking for consistent behaviour patterns."

private practice, located beside the Swiss Chalet on Weber. Her rates are \$85 per visit for the general public, but offers a student rate of \$60. UW students have another option available to them: "Health services does offer nutrition consults with the nurses that I work with, so there's

**Eat for energy — easy as 1 - 2 - 3.
Have balanced "mini-meal"
snacks. Eat every 3 to 4 hours.**

The third message, eating snacks (or "mini-meals"), also ties in. Limiting yourself to three meals a day is not compatible with eating every three to four hours. So plan to have a couple of balanced mini-meals (1-2-3) along with your regular meals. Barton offers a couple of suggestions of stand-alone foods that "offer your body basically the right nutrient balance," such as yogurt.

Along with her duties at the university, Barton operates her own

Linda Brogdan and Sheila Wilson, and you can go in and do a nutritional consult they have all these resources, we've set them all up over the years, so that they can take a student through a very nice look at their eating habits — because I cost money and not everybody wants to pay sixty bucks (student fee) to talk to me."

Next week, we'll look at some of the issues that she deals with in her practice.

Changing your life Part II of an interview with UW's nutritionist

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Last week, we ran a feature on UW's nutrition education consultant, Linda Barton, and the messages she's trying to get across to students. Well, we're not done yet.

Barton's private practice is located across a parking lot from the Swiss Chalet on Weber Street. Most of her clients are active people — athletes. She has worked with teams from both UW and Laurier, among others; however, it's not only athletes as defined by their participation in competitive organized sports: "Someone who's made a daily commitment to activity, some of the fitness people, the people that swim, the people who join walking groups, to me they're athletes.

"I deal with people that want to improve. They probably have had some trouble, although a good third of my clients come just to get better, there's nothing wrong with them. They just see this as a tool that they can use in their daily living to improve their well-being. The other crowd, though, have experienced some kind of issue with food — it's stopped working really well for them. There's different reasons they would come, just from an energy reason up to a full-blown eating disorder, so my message is not the same for each client.

Some people will come to her saying, "I am just having a rotten time — I am not eating well, I'm not sleeping well — could you help me out?" Others are having more serious issues with food and eating, such as the "athlete that's starving because they're a cross-country runner and they've just been eating carbs for so long and they just go 'off the wagon,' as they tell me, and they don't binge on protein, they binge on sugar.

"Women and jujubes — it's a really big deal. And then they're upset because they wish that hadn't happened... all that negative energy."

Barton describes what they'll be working towards with her help: "There's a kind of satisfaction and pleasant energy that comes from eating well. Some people have never experienced it and some people greatly miss it, but they can't put their finger on what's different."

Trying to change the way you eat is an attempt to change your life. Change is often hard, but is often

worth it. Barton recommends potential clients call around before choosing her to help them. "This is a really personal relationship when you start wanting to change your life. You should find somebody that you connect with. It might not be me. If it's not me, don't come in here to find out it's not me. Talk to me on the phone."

"Between the two of us, we put together a pattern of living that works for them. We're going to look at stress, we're going to look at sleep, now, I don't deal specifically with those areas, but we look at them."

There's a kind of satisfaction and pleasant energy that comes from eating well.

To bring about change in an individual's eating patterns, Barton has found success in three main principles. "This is my idea, born of my years witnessing people changing. When I look back on my practice I came up with these three tips — [people] change if they eat in balance, they change if they eat every three to four hours, and if they pay serious attention to snacks — I like to call this a mini-meal."

Barton's strategy for dealing with a person's compulsive eating problem is not the same as some other food practitioners might recommend: "I do not think everything in moderation works for everybody. If you have a known binge food, in my practice I would ask you to stay away from that binge food for a period of time. Definitely I don't think a compulsive eater can have everything in moderation.

"If I have someone who's truly a compulsive eater, as they define themselves — they know — I'm not going to waste their time on something I have learned is not going to create a result for them.

"I go back to some of these basic principles of retrain your eating behaviour. I really get upset when a

person who has a real serious issue goes to a dietician and is told, they should be able to control themselves. There are some people that need specific skills and they haven't learned them yet. They need help with that, so instead of control, I talk about choice, because most people I work with are not going to learn that, or they already would have."

Another approach that Barton does not agree with is that used by some physicians dealing with an overweight individual. "They believe that this population must lose weight quickly to feel good about themselves. I totally tackle that. I do not like it."

Barton describes diets such as the Zone and the Atkins diet as being "on the right track," because they do look to include protein and fat in each meal, which is important, but feels the insufficient amount of carbohydrates is where they fail.

"The thing about the Zone for active people is that the carbohydrate intake is far too low. It causes damage. People get hungry, they get off track, they lose body weight, and other things happen that are more serious — your body changes, the way you metabolize food changes.

"I'm a R.D. [registered dietician], which means I'm a member of the College of Dietitians of Ontario, and I'm a legislated health professional. I have to follow certain practice standards. I cannot recommend a meal plan like that and keep my credential."

Keep in mind that the "message is not the same for each client." A visit with Linda Barton, or another dietician, is an individualized thing. What is covered in the session is dependent on you and what you bring in.

Health Services nurses Linda Brogden and Sheila Wilson, while not offering all that Barton does, are both able to take a "very nice look at [your] eating habits."

"When a student does come into see me, if they've gone through that route, then one appointment with me is often enough, because they can go back to the nurse. The nurses have given them all the basic information, what I do is the very specific work of looking at their fuel plan. But all the healthy eating stuff, that's not really my work. My work is the harder part — to get you to do it."

Linda Barton can be reached at (519) 578-8507.