What Do You Want for Snack Time?

So, I am taking the GRE tomorrow. All the advice I have seen says to bring a snack for the 10-minute break. Most articles specifically say a granola or energy bar. This poses a problem with my thesis of what would make an equivalent snack. Yes, I could break the rules and go buy an energy bar, but that could also end up making me feel sick during the exam if it has food dyes or preservatives.

Overall, here are my criteria:

- Protein
- Natural sugar from fruit
- I can eat it in under 5 minutes
- Tastes fine at room temperature

I have considered a sandwich, but it would take too long to eat and would take too much blood flow away from my brain to digest it. Right now, I have some dried cranberries and mixed nuts in the house. This is my best bet, but I am afraid it will make me thirsty. You are not allowed to have water in the testing room. I could take an apple, but I will probably not finish it.

What snack would you recommend?
Thursday, November 21, 2013

To Grandma's House We Go

Today I want to tell you some of my favorite food memories from visiting my Grandma and Grandpa Vinkemulder’s house as a child. My sister and I would visit several times a year, as they were only an hour away from us.

My fondest memory comes from Christmas time. We would go over, along with my cousins Tim and Mary to make sugar cookies. Grandma always had the cutest shaped molds. I remember the gingerbread man and the stars. After they were baked came the best part, frosting and candy. Several if not all of the cookies had more frosting then cookie to them. There were different colors of sprinkles and I liked eating those straight. Catherine, my sister, loved covering her cookies with red hots. They were always too spicy for me. When we got older, gingerbread houses came into the mix. The candies that came with them always tasted stale, but I ate them anyway. Grandma did not care, even if my mother got on my case that I had too much sugar.

Another favorite experience was afternoon lunch. It is a tradition for us to make ground bologna and pickle. Yes, that means taking a ring of bologna and sending it through the meat grinder. Then you grind up the pickles the same way. My sister and I never really liked pickles so we got our share of bologna before the pickles were added. This was my grandpa’s favorite; he had it growing up as a child. We would then make sandwiches. Mine would be bologna and cheese, but I remember my sister once tried cinnamon swirl bread, bologna, jello, mac and cheese, peanut butter, and sun chips etc. She said it tasted good. The most important part of the sandwiches was how they were cut. Grandma called them choo-choo train sandwiches. You cut the sandwich into Lego sized pieces and then place them around the edge of the plate like a train. I always found my food more entertaining to eat this way. Her cheese also came from a block and you had to use a cheese slicer. That was so much fun.

Last but not least were my Grandma Vink’s chocolate chip cookies. These are the best cookies you ever had. When we came over the cookie jar was always full and I would always try to snitch a few before lunch when my mom was not looking. I remember my first week of final exams in college when I received a special delivery. A box of 3-dozen chocolate chip cookies from my grandma. She said she took them to the post office when they were still warm to have them shipped in one day.

It is these traditions that I hope to pass along to my children and grandchildren. These wonderful memories spent around food and family.
In loving memory - Mary Vinkemulder
Saturday, November 23, 2013

Eating Out the Fridge

My original title for this post was "Cleaning Out the Fridge" but I realized that I was not throwing food out, so the title was not quite appropriate. In four days, I am heading home for Thanksgiving break. Therefore, I am trying to eat the food that will spoil first. Then I will not come back to school with a stinky fridge or a mess to clean up.

I have to admit that I have not been keeping as good a track of when my food will spoil to begin with. So far, nothing smells too funny, so I will take that as a good sign.

I need to eat a lot of yogurt, pancakes, muffins, and cheese before I leave. On a positive note, I will be cooking less and just eating leftovers. It is kinda nice, not cooking as much.

Thanksgiving break will be great, lots of food and lots of cooking for my family!
Not So Healthy Diet

In my process of eating what is left in my fridge, I find I tend to favor certain foods. Bacon. Cookies. Cookie dough. Banana bread. None of these things are exactly healthy for me even if they are organic. That is a big thing to take away from this project. Just because food is advertised to be organic, free range, or otherwise healthy for you, does not mean that they are good for you in large quantities. Sadly, I cannot survive on bacon and cookie dough alone, even though that would be wonderful. I need to instead balance them out with fruits, vegetables, and rice.

College is a time of abusing freedom and learning from it. I hope to learn in advance not to do things that are bad for me, but I am afraid some mistakes have to be made so that the whole value is learned. Already this semester I have gotten tired of biscuits and lentil soup and butter. Others are escaping my mind at the moment. So, at some point I will be tired of bacon, if that is even possible.

What food do you want to eat day in and day out?

UPDATE: Don't worry mama bears, I have already learned from my poor diet choices. Unsettle stomach is a good lesson to remember.
Thanksgiving Part 1: Cooking

Today, the day before Thanksgiving, my family and I are preparing some of the food. I was put in charge of the turkey since I convinced my parents it was a good idea to buy a free range one from Becker Farms that ended up being 22 lbs. I spent last night researching how to cook a whole turkey, as I have never cooked turkey before.

I decided to not follow any particular recipe. My friend Leander taught me how to cook a whole chicken a few years ago, so I decided to adapt the approach. No, I did not measure anything. Basically, I made a paste out of butter, and fresh rosemary, sage, and thyme and rubbed that underneath the skin. Then I filled the cavity with the remaining fresh herbs and some chopped onion. Then the whole turkey was put in a Reynolds turkey bag in order to keep in the moisture.
Yay giblets!!

My mixture that went under the skin.
Turkey almost ready for the oven!!

I will update later with how it turns out.
Thanksgiving Part 2: The Feast

I still feel so stuffed from yesterday. Here are some photos of what we made and ate:

The turkey turned out fine, a little drier then what I wanted but my family said that it tasted good.

The gravy was... well thick. And rather flour and starch like. I have concluded that making gravy is an art that I have not mastered yet, but this was my first try.
My dad cooked a beef tenderloin in addition to the turkey. This has been tradition for many years and it is delicious.

I also made French bread; they turned out to be the largest loaves yet and the best tasting. Sadly, I forgot to take a picture of it before it was eaten.
Here is all the food laid out on the table to serve. French fries, olives, pickles, and cranberry jelly from a can were also on the menu.

I made an apple pie from scratch for dessert. The crust was nice and flakey with my secret ingredient.

So, that is my Thanksgiving dinner that served 12. There is a ton of leftover turkey, so that will be going back to school with me.
Monday, December 2, 2013

**Short and Sweet**

As I begin to write this post, I have 5 days, 12 hours, and 18 minutes left of this project. Thanksgiving break was a wonderful and I must have gained a few pounds with all the food that I ate.

As I go into this last week, I have to admit it is harder and harder to keep to my rules. I am trying my best, eating lots of leftover turkey. I already used a loophole today and ate a doughnut, but it was free. I will finish this project strong. Some motivation for me is that I am going out to eat with friends on Sunday. I can make it that long.

I have 94 days on this diet under my belt and I am still averaging around $5 a day. My main goal this week is to not give up as I have made it this far.

Sorry for the short post, but I do not have much to say.
Tuesday, December 3, 2013

Cleaning Out the Fridge

Just for fun, here is a post of what I ate today, all brought to you by my fridge/pantry!

Breakfast:
- oatmeal with sugar

Lunch:
- Lentil soup
- snickerdoodle cookie dough

Dinner:
- corn
- turkey

I did not have to cook a thing, just reheat in the microwave. It makes the week less stressful knowing that I have food put away that is simple to reheat. It may not be the most balanced of diets, but as long as I am full and my brain is functioning, I am ok.

This is how I plan to eat until the project is done, focusing on leftovers and cleaning out the fridge.
Friday, December 6, 2013

A New Addiction that Goes Crunch!!

So last night was the premier of the film that my seminar has been working on all semester. With any large event, there tends to food, in our case, we provided fresh local free food for the attendees. During clean up, there were leftovers, so nearly everyone got to take some food home. I got a gallon of apple cider, a whole box of assorted cranberry muffins, and best of all, corn chips.

I did not realize until last night how much I have missed crunchy food. No worries, these chips contain stone ground white corn, water, oil, lime, and sea salt. They are also GMO free. Back to crunchy food, when you reheat dishes, even if they had a crunch someplace, it tends to go away. These chips seem even crunchier then I remember. I may have even eaten half of the bag last night alone. The rest may not survive today. I do not know why, but there is something satisfying about hearing a crunch when you bite down on a chip. Even when I started getting a stomachache, I kept eating them. That crunch is addictive.

Anyway, I know that from Sunday onward I am going to go and buy chips and other crunchy foods to enjoy, hopefully in moderation.
Saturday, December 7, 2013

6 More Hours

Yes, I am counting down almost to the minute now (355 left). I am ready to be done with my real food thesis. Are there any restaurants open after midnight? I am craving a pizza. I am so ready to go out with friends and eat at a restaurant. My fridge is becoming empty, so I will probably go shopping tomorrow. Honestly, I predict that I will still primarily buy non-processed food, but I will give you a report tomorrow.

There is one aspect of this project that I will be ecstatic to not do any more.... calculate how much everything I eat costs. With this restraint gone, I think my dietary patterns will change and I will not associate as much stress with eating. Who knows, I might even eat more when I am not required to track it. I am excited to be done, but I am glad that I have gone through this process. I have learned to cook a lot of different things such as meat and hummus. I have also learned more about eating a balanced diet and noticing when my body tells me I need something.

I can do this.... 340 minutes left!!!!
The Final Numbers

So, I am officially done with the Real Food Thesis. The experience has been amazing. One good way to show what I learned is through the piles of data I collected. So here are some of the final numbers.

- Average spent on food per day: $4.88
- Per week: $34.19
- Per month: $136.75
- Total Spent on food: $630.66
- Total Eaten: $488.39
- Total Food Waste: $47.93 (7.6% of what I spent on food total).
- Days on the project: 112, 100 of which followed the rules entirely (other days were breaks or I was sick)
- 16 Weeks long
- 10 lb. lost

What do you think? I am personally shocked by how little I spent a day. The most I spent on food while following the diet in one day was $8.57 on September 24. I had Jamba Juice for dinner, and that cost $4.90, but it still followed the rules. The least I spent on food in one day was $0 because I was eating lots of free food. Other low days were caused by me being sick. Days that I was home were not calculated into this. If they were, I would have averaged $4.36 per day.

I will have one or two more posts before I call it quits. Thank you for following me on my journey.
Tuesday, December 10, 2013

Back Where I Began

The project is over. I should be fine going out to eat. Tonight I got dinner at Subway just because I could and I did not feel like cooking anything. As I drove there, back, and while eating, I could not shake the feeling that what I was doing was wrong.

While reviewing my seminar's film "Down to Earth: Small Farm Issues in a Big Farm World", it hit me. Sarah Hackney from the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition said, "We all eat three times a day. We all have three times a day to choose what we put into our bodies and where it comes from". Wow, eating is more than just fueling our bodies. It is a way to vote with your money, for what is good for you and the environment.

I do not have to deal with the rules anymore, but who says I have to stop following them. Most food that is processed has been giving me stomachaches and I am starting to run low on Alka-Seltzer. Why should I put myself through that when I am craving apples and carrots, not Cheetos or Oreos?

I think for the most part, I will choose to eat local, unprocessed food from now on. It is cheaper than take-out or processed food from the store. It is less likely to make me sick. It tastes better. I know what I am putting into my body, which makes me more comfortable.

How about you, do you think about what you put into your body? Your children's?