



Welcome to Branch Out with Dan & Mal, a weekly newsletter on all things health, wellbeing, and wellness at Midland!

OAKay, Let's Talk...

Mallory's Report:

As sports ramp up and schedules remain busy, I'm seeing more students skipping meals to catch up on work or squeeze in extra sleep. I understand the temptation—finishing that assignment or getting a few more minutes of rest can feel urgent. However, eating regular meals is one of the best ways to stay energized and focused throughout your school day. While rest matters, proper nutrition is key to keeping you alert during classes and extracurriculars.

The answer to "what is enough food for me?" varies based on your individual needs. At the most basic level, your body needs carbohydrates, fats, and proteins to function effectively. About 45-65% of your daily intake should come from carbohydrates, which serve as your body's primary fuel and provide energy for your muscles and central nervous system. Protein helps build and repair muscles, tissues, and organs, while also aiding in hormone regulation. Sources like meat, poultry, fish, eggs, cheese, yogurt, and tofu should make up 10-30% of your daily intake. Fats provide essential fatty acids and fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K. Fat sources like nuts, seeds, oils, and dairy products should comprise 20-35% of your daily intake.

There's no perfect system or ratio. The most important part of nutrition is listening to your body. Eat when you're hungry and stop when you're full. Getting to know your body's cues is essential to getting adequate nourishment for the busy, active life of a Midland student.

Dan's Report:

As I was considering what to share this week, I thought back to some of the lessons I learned over the years through difficult challenges related to my own behavioral choices (or maybe more like emotionally driven impulse-decisions). And one thing I've learned both personally and professionally is that emotion isn't always the most dependable guide for response or action.

Adolescence is the ultimate "perfect storm" of rapid development we experience (yes, "we" adults experienced it at one point as well), and it is absolutely loaded with emotion. When I was a teen, many of my actions were driven by heavy emotion, and they often led to deep regret and costly consequences. I often found myself saying, "Why did I do that? I had a feeling that could've happened!"

As a mental health professional, I've supported countless students who've done the same, and it's led to those same feelings of regret and consequence that I suffered through. So, I just want to share one of the simple takeaways it's taught me. **I've come to intimately know that voice I/you/we are hearing to be our "gut" feeling or our instinct. When you come upon the next moment you're making a risky or impulsive decision, just STOP for a moment.** That little pause can give you a second to listen to what that "gut" feeling is telling you. More times than not, it will lead us to the wiser and less regrettable choice!

In a Nutshell -- Deep Dive of the Week

Artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots like ChatGPT and Google's AI have become incredibly popular for looking up health information. They're fast, convenient, and seem to give confident answers to medical questions. But recent research and expert warnings reveal some serious problems you need to know about before trusting AI with your health concerns.

A recent study from Mount Sinai Medical School discovered something alarming: **when researchers fed AI chatbots fake medical terms, like made-up diseases, symptoms, and tests, the AI didn't question them.** Instead, the chatbots confidently generated detailed explanations about conditions that don't even exist.

This happens because AI systems pull information from everything on the internet without reliably distinguishing between accurate medical sources and misinformation. As Dr. Eyal Klang from Mount Sinai explains, even a single made-up term can trigger a detailed response based entirely on fiction.

Doctors warn that these tools have other serious limitations too. There's a famous example where someone asked Google's AI what to do for a kidney stone, and it told them to drink urine. The AI was trying to combine advice about drinking fluids and checking your urine color, but it mashed the information together in a dangerous way. These errors, called "hallucinations," happen when AI generates responses that sound plausible but are completely wrong. Even worse, AI answers can "drift" over time, giving you different responses to the same question depending on when you ask.

This doesn't mean AI is useless for health questions. It just means you need to be smart about how you use it. Doctors recommend treating AI as a starting point for learning, not as your final answer. If you're going to search health topics online, stick to reputable sources like Mayo Clinic, Cleveland Clinic, or other established medical organizations. When using AI, ask specific rather than general questions (instead of "Why does my chest hurt?" try "I notice my heart pounds during stressful situations. What could cause this?").

Most importantly, always confirm anything you learn online with actual medical professionals, whether that's your doctor, the health office here at Midland, or another qualified healthcare provider.

For more information on navigating AI and health information, check out this awesome article from the American Medical Association.

Acorny Ending

We are exactly one week away from Thanksgiving and couldn't be more excited to spend it here at Midland. As we navigate this final push, don't forget to make time for you.

We're on your team—and we're rooting for you.



Mallory McPherson-Wehan
Health Director



Dan Petrocelli
School Counselor