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The Grapevine NEWSLETTER



**TEACHERS COLLEGE
PROGRAM IN NUTRITION**

**PANTRY-FRIENDLY RECIPES:
"MEAL-IN-A-BAG" IDEAS**

Letter from the Editors



Dear Students, Faculty, Alumni, and Staff,

Welcome to the fall issue of the Grapevine! As the weather turns colder, we are glad to introduce articles from our fellow classmates as the start of a new academic year begins.

Inside this issue you will find seasonal delights and catch up with what our students have been doing over the semester! Our writers also share different actions dietitians can take to advocate for important causes and strategies to better serve patients and clients.

Hopefully everyone has been having a good year so far and will continue to do so during the holiday season. Warm wishes!



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FUELING THE FINISH LINE: *TC's Marathon Runners on Fueling, Training, and Finding Their Stride*

BY EDEN FALES



Every step you take engages 200 muscles, within more than a dozen muscle groups, that work in tandem to propel you forward. During a marathon, the average runner will take between 50,000 and 55,000 steps. Not to mention the hundreds of thousands of steps a runner will take in the months prior as preparation. Each step requires energy, this energy is the product of the complex metabolic processing of macro and micronutrients that make up what we eat. So, what do you run on?

Training is unequivocally a huge part of preparing for a marathon, but, in consensus with our students, fueling is just as important.

How you fuel your body during training and on race day is a hot topic with long-distance runners, and in the sports nutrition field especially. Our TC community boasts many students and alumni that will be running marathons this year, many of whom are within our own MS-RDN program. I had the chance to chat with two of TC's MS-RDN students, Lauren Warfield and Emma Laudisi, about their marathon training plans for this fall.

Lauren, a second year Nutrition and Exercise Physiology student, is running the Dallas Marathon in December, which will be her first marathon. In terms of race day nutrition, Lauren shouts out her favorite energy gel, You Again's Super Honey. This honey gel provides carbohydrates and electrolytes to help maintain hydration and energy reserves.

Emma is also a second year in the program, and completed the Philadelphia Marathon this November. Emma's tip for prospective marathoners is to not overlook the importance of cross-training, "It's definitely important to prevent injury by becoming stronger in all the muscles you use for running,". Running, especially long-distance running, can be impactful on your joints so strengthening the supporting muscles is a great way to preserve stability and decrease joint stress.

Emma enjoys biking and lifting to prevent burnout or overuse injuries and support her long run days. Lauren, who works part-time at Barry's, a fitness studio focused on HIIT-style workouts, incorporates strength training to her classes to build complementary muscle groups and add variety to her routine.

Increasing carbohydrate intake 36 to 48 hours before a long run, ie. "carb loading," is important to maximize glycogen stores and support aerobic capacity. Studies have shown that athletes that carb-loaded ran faster and had higher glucose and lactate concentrations by the end of a long run. Higher blood glucose levels suggest greater fuel availability, while elevated lactate indicates increased carbohydrate metabolism, which supports greater sustainment of high intensity exercise (Sullo, 1998).

Lauren and Emma agree that a meal the night before a long run should be carbohydrate-heavy to replenish and maximize muscle glycogen stores, plus moderate protein while keeping fat and fiber low. Both fiber and fat slow digestive processes which can cause adverse gastrointestinal effects during prolonged exercise.

As for the day of, Lauren says "eating before a workout is essential". Emma recommends to "find what works for you to eat before a run", and that "timing is key", specifically "eating two hours before a run" allows for proper digestion of a meal with quick carbs like maple syrup or a running gel right before.

Refueling after a long run is incredibly important to replete glycogen stores, repair muscular damage, and replace lost electrolytes. Emma recommends "having something with carbs and protein within the hour" for quicker recovery. Moreover, active recovery is important, and Lauren emphasizes paying attention to and respecting your stress levels. Speaking to endurance athletes, Lauren advises, "Your biggest competitor is yourself." Incorporating intentional rest into your training routine is essential for high performance. Now get out there and run—but make sure to grab a snack on your way out! We also want to congratulate Leslie Puebla, second year student who finished the NYC Marathon in early November.

Sullo, A., Monda, M., Brizzi, G., Meninno, V., Papa, A., Lombardi, P., & Fabbri, B. (1998). The effect of a carbohydrate loading on running performance during a 25-km treadmill time trial by level of aerobic capacity in athletes. *European review for medical and pharmacological sciences*, 2(5-6), 195–202.

What Microbes Mean for Reproductive Health

BY LINDSEY ANDERSON LEE



New research in female mice reveals that living without gut microbes — being germ-free — speeds up reproductive aging and the loss of primordial follicles, the ovary's egg precursors. When previously germ-free mice were colonized with a conventional microbiota, these ovarian-aging patterns eased. What could explain the importance of “germs” for fertility health? A commentary in Microbiome says the gut microbiome might be the answer.

Our large intestine is home to trillions of microscopic organisms that interact with our metabolism, immunity, and endocrine signaling. The wonder and intrigue of the gut microbiome is a fast-moving area with promising potential for future dietetic interventions. Reproductive health is one such area. Although findings thus far are correlational, distinct gut microbial patterns have been reported alongside primary ovarian insufficiency (POI), polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), reduced ovarian reserve, endometriosis, infertility, and early menopause.

The bacteria living in our gut are just that – living. They are constantly growing, multiplying, and dying off. The dynamic nature of the gut microbiome means we have the power to shift its composition. In fact, our gut microbiome can be significantly modified within days of dietary changes. In particular, adding fermentable fiber, such as that found in beans, lentils, intact whole grains (oats, barley), nuts, seeds, fruits, and a daily pile of vegetables, can tilt the microbiome toward short-chain fatty acid producers within 1-5 days. In contrast, animal-heavy, low-fiber meals quickly favor bile-tolerant microbes and reduce fiber-fermenters.

So how do those diet-shaped communities influence fertility? Three big themes have emerged thus far: microbial signaling, ovary immune tone, and estrogen recycling.

Microbial Signaling:

Fiber passes through the small intestine undigested by us. When it reaches the large intestine, resident microbes feast on the fiber and produce short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs): acetate, propionate, and butyrate. These small molecules act as signals that bind to “antennas” on cellular surfaces called G-protein-coupled receptors. When SCFAs dock on these receptors, they flip intracellular switches that change what the cell releases and by dampening inflammatory signals, nudging how we use energy, and altering hormone release – all processes that can influence the ovarian cycle's success.

SCFA signals also inhibit histone deacetylases (HDACs) inside cells. HDACs normally tighten chromatin, the DNA-protein packaging in cells, which makes genes harder to access. Inhibiting HDACs opens chromatin and can shift which genes are turned on or off. In animal studies, SCFA-driven effects are linked to better preservation of ovarian reserve. But it's not just SCFA signals that microbes produce: some microbes (such as *Eggerthella lenta* and *Gordonibacter pamelaeae*) convert our own steroids into progesterone-like molecules. Since progesterone stabilizes the uterine lining after ovulation supporting implantation and early pregnancy, these progesterone look-alike products may matter for reproductive health.

Ovary Immune Tone:

The ovary has its own immune pit crew on duty each cycle. Cells like macrophages, dendritic cells, regulatory T cells (Tregs), Th17 cells, natural killer cells, and innate lymphoid cells patrol the tissue and release cytokines, chemical “text messages” that promote follicle growth, ovulation, new blood vessels, and tissue repair. Inputs from the gut microbiome, especially SCFAs, help set the “thermostat” of the ovarian immune system. When the thermostat runs hot, or more pro-inflammatory, follicles are nudged to wake up faster, which may use up the ovarian reserve sooner. Inflammation also pushes repair toward fibrotic remodeling, laying down extra collagen that stiffens the ovary, reduces blood flow, and blunts cell-to-cell communication. Over time, that stiffness can make ovulation less efficient and interfere with healthy follicle development.

Estrogen Recycling:

Some gut microbes (e.g., *Bacteroides thetaiotaomicron*, *Phocaeicola vulgatus*, and *Clostridium perfringens*) carry an enzyme called β -glucuronidase that deconjugates estrogens found in bile. Essentially, the liver “gift-wraps” used estrogens with a tag so they can be tossed out in bile. β -glucuronidase unwraps those estrogens in the gut, allowing them to be reabsorbed into the bloodstream. This estrogen-recycling system known as the estrobolome can shift how much active estrogen is circulating. In studies, higher “estrobolome” activity appears more often alongside PCOS, endometriosis, and early menopause. Although we currently don't have proof of cause, the takeaway is simple: microbiome-driven estrogen recycling may nudge hormone balance in ways that matter for cycles, symptoms, and implantation.

The bottom line? The gut microbiome is a plausible link between diet and how our ovaries function and age. Much of the research in this area is done in animal models and proof of causality needs to be determined, but one step is low-risk and high-upside: trade a Western, low-fiber, ultra-processed pattern for a fiber-forward, minimally processed plate. It's good for metabolic health, good for your microbes, and may be good for your gametes.

Written by Lindsey Anderson Lee, founder of [Bloom Balance Health](#), a fertility & hormonal health nutrition practice

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From Clinician to Patient

A Dietitian's Firsthand Experience with Gastric Cancer and Post-Gastrectomy Nutrition BY JERIANNE CUSIPAG

Registered Dietitian (RD) Ilana Kersch has dedicated over a decade to clinical nutrition, a career path she knew she wanted to pursue since high school. She completed her degree and dietetic internship through NYU and loved the blend of nutrition, food, and biochemistry. She worked in inpatient care at Mt. Sinai Hospital for nine years, specializing in nutrition support, critical care, and serving on the liver transplant team for five years. This experience sparked her initial interest in gastrointestinal (GI) nutrition, covering hepatobiliary issues and GI surgeries.

In 2021, Ilana received a diagnosis of gastric cancer. This was not entirely unexpected, as there was a strong genetic link and family history. According to the Memorial Sloan Kettering website, 10% of gastric cancers are due to a genetic mutation inherited from a parent. Her mother was diagnosed in 2017 with stomach cancer and tested positive for a variant of the cancer-causing gene CDH1. Ilana subsequently tested positive for the same gene. After years of frequent screenings, her annual upper endoscopy in July 2021 found microscopic signet ring cancer cells, a highly malignant type of cancer typically found in glandular cells that line the digestive organs.

This led to a recommendation for an immediate total gastrectomy. She was diagnosed at stage 1A and underwent surgery six weeks later. Utilizing her expertise as an RD, she proactively optimized her health before the radical procedure, gaining about 12 pounds and increasing her muscle mass. She also indulged in foods such as fried chicken and pizza, knowing she wouldn't be able to tolerate them afterwards.

Ilana's experience as a patient fundamentally changed her career focus. Though she knew the textbook guidelines for managing her post-gastrectomy complications, such as avoiding concentrated sweets and employing small, frequent meals, she discovered that theoretical knowledge was not the whole picture. The real challenge was implementation: balancing the avoidance of symptoms, like preventing dumping syndrome, with the vital need to consume enough calories and protein. Dumping syndrome, or rapid gastric emptying, is a collection of symptoms that occur when the stomach empties its contents rapidly into the small intestine.

This forced her to pivot to shredded chicken, Greek yogurt, cheese, and coffee fortified with collagen protein powder. Eating became a full time job, requiring meticulous attention to separating solids and liquids and thoroughly chewing food. Her recovery also included a dangerous delay in care when she was dismissed by a medical provider after experiencing escalating pain post-surgery caused by a major infection.

Post recovery, Ilana left her job in inpatient care and moved to New York Presbyterian to focus on outpatient care. She found that working long-term with patients allowed her to have a greater impact on their quality of life, something often missing in acute inpatient settings.



Drawing on her dual experience as a patient and clinician, Ilana offers vital advice for aspiring and current dietitians alike:

1. **Prioritize the patient relationship:** Dietitians must remember that the person in front of them is a person, not just a case study. Effectiveness is rooted in the relationship, which sometimes means setting aside a checklist of questions, making eye contact, and listening.
2. **Believe the patient:** Clinicians must genuinely listen to patients and believe them when they report that something is wrong, even if their symptoms seem inconvenient or don't fit the expected clinical picture.
3. **Advocate with evidence:** To ensure nutritional needs are prioritized by the interdisciplinary team, dietitians should be visible and vocal. When communicating with doctors, it is most helpful to send evidence, such as a systematic review or study, to support recommendations based on clear literature.
4. **Handle survivorship with nuance:** When counseling cancer survivors, dietitians should approach with an open mind, recognizing that initial goals and symptoms may change significantly over time. It is crucial to acknowledge the emotional impact and the frustration patients feel about having to relearn dietary habits.



While Ilana shared her story for this newsletter to educate those in the nutrition field, she advises dietitians to exercise caution when sharing personal information with patients. Sharing personal experiences can show empathy, however, too much detail can derail a valuable 30-minute session and shift the focus away from the patient's needs. She also stresses that patients, especially those actively struggling, are not at their best, and clinicians should try not to take any perceived disengagement or irritability personally.

Ilana's path from clinical dietitian to cancer survivor illustrates how personal experience can transform professional practice. Her transition from clinician to patient reinforced that true nutrition care goes beyond science—it's about empathy, listening, and advocacy. Through her experience, she reminds all dietitians that the most meaningful care happens when evidence meets compassion.

You can connect with Ilana Kersch, MS, RD, CNSC on LinkedIn or email ilana.d.kersch@gmail.com.

In the Room Where It Happens:

Students Advocate for Public Health in D.C

By Allison L'heureux

In the words of Aaron Burr, a group of TC students had the chance to be “in the room where it happens” when we attended the Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE) conference in Washington, D.C as part of a course offered by Professor John Allegrante taken by the MS-RDN Nutrition and Public Health specialization students. There, we joined advocates from across the country to tackle misinformation in public health, support CDC school health policies, and —perhaps most importantly—



find common ground among lawmakers from all sides of the political spectrum.

The conference offered a rich variety of workshops, seminars, and advocacy training sessions that helped students refine their communication and policy skills. Between sessions, we networked with professionals and fellow students from across the U.S. —and proudly

discovered that New York and Columbia University had the largest group in attendance. Way to represent!

The highlight of the conference came on the final day, when we visited Capitol Hill to meet with state representatives and advocate for key public health policies. The Hill visits brought the weekend's lessons full circle, as we put our advocacy training into action to address today's public health challenges.

A few standout lessons from the conference stuck with the group. Malynnda Stewart, founder of Communication Compass, reminded everyone that “...empathy requires connection, not agreement.” Sustainable advocacy, she explained, isn’t about resolving every disagreement—it’s about building relationships that can withstand them. “Today’s opponent could be tomorrow’s ally,” she said, emphasizing the importance of a relationship-driven approach to advocacy.

Brian C. Castrucci, CEO of the de Beaumont Foundation, compared communication to a muscle—it takes practice to strengthen it. To connect effectively, he said, advocates must tailor their message to their audience. His four golden rules: “Speak with clarity, be consistent, tell good stories, and cultivate community presence.”

So, how can we all work to be more effective advocates? One simple way is to help others tell their stories. Not everyone can go to Capitol Hill, but hosting a community dinner or gathering where people can share their experiences can be just as powerful. And don’t underestimate the impact of reaching out to your elected officials—every call, email, or letter is documented, and repeated contact can help put issues on their radar. Take advantage of apps, like [5 Calls](#), to make reaching out to your elected officials easier.



Staffers on the Hill repeatedly emphasized that policymakers rely on hearing directly from their constituents to stay informed. So, speak up! Share your story, make your voice heard, and keep working to be “in the room where it happens.”

Pantry Friendly Recipes

As a result of the government shutdown and recent federal court rulings, the status of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which supports approximately 42 million Americans, remains mixed causing hardship for recipients nationwide. Although the federal government has reopened, there is still uncertainty about when all recipients will receive their full November benefits.

The Grapevine co-editors have put together some “meal-in-a-bag” recipes inspired by the social media account [@dtdinners](#). Pack a large zip-lock bag with the required shelf-stable ingredients and the recipe print-outs below to donate to your local food pantry or use for your own meals because everyone deserves to have a nourishing meal.

Follow the links below for other ways to advocate for food security:

- [Use 5-Calls to Contact Your Policymakers](#)
- Donate Money or Time to [Your Local Food Bank](#)
- Follow credible news sources for updates: [Food Research & Action Center \(FRAC\)](#), [Share Our Strength](#) and, [School Nutrition Association](#), the [National WIC Association](#), and [Center for Budget Policy and Priorities](#)



Photo credit: [@dtdinners](#) on Instagram

White Chicken Chili

Cook Time: 10 - 12 minutes **Serves:** 4 - 6

Ingredients:

- 1 (12.5 oz) can chunk white chicken, drained
- 2 cans Great Northern Beans, (undrained for creamier texture)
- 1 can whole kernel corn
- 1 can green enchilada sauce
- 1 can salsa verde or diced green chilis
- 1 can Cream of Chicken soup

Add cumin, garlic powder, onion powder, chili powder for more flavor. Top with cilantro, shredded cheese, or lime if available.

Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients in a large pot. Add 1-2 cups of water for desired consistency.
2. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 20 - 25 minutes, stirring occasionally.
3. Optional: Mash some of the beans for thicker consistency.



Homestyle Turkey Supper Pack



Directions:

1. Drain the turkey or chicken, but do not discard broth. Add the turkey/chicken to a pot with 2 cups of water and the packet of turkey gravy mix. Heat through until thickened.
2. Prepare the stuffing mix according to the box directions. Swap the butter or margarine for the reserved turkey/chicken broth from the can.
3. Heat the green beans and prepare the mashed potatoes as directed.
4. Serve the warm turkey or chicken and gravy over the mashed potatoes alongside the stuffing, cranberry sauce, and corn.
5. Enjoy!

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Cook Time: 20 minutes **Serves:** 2

Ingredients:

- 2 cans turkey or chunk white chicken
- 1 box stuffing mix
- 1 packet turkey gravy mix
- 1 can green beans
- 1 packet instant mashed potatoes
- 1 can cranberry sauce
- 1 can whole kernel corn



Site Placement Highlights **By Sarde Gumalo**

We caught up with MS-RDN students, Catalina Duque and Casey Malone, while doing their Community Rotation at Columbia University Athletics where they spent 10 weeks working with dietitian and preceptor, Rachel de la Torre. We also heard from An Vo about their food service rotation at NYC Public Schools.

What is your day-to-day like at your rotation?

Catalina: It varies, sometimes we have student-athlete consultation sessions combined with nutrition education tabling. We've also attended conferences and team talks to learn more about sports nutrition topics.

Casey: In addition, we help manage issues student-athletes may be having with the vending machines which are filled with snacks for refueling. We've had the chance to lead counseling sessions where comfortable and assist with writing after-visit summaries. Apart from that, we observe team lifts and practices and spend time creating engaging educational material for nutrition tabling with different topics each week.



CU Athletics - Community Rotation Pictured from left to right, Linsu Ding, Sarde Gumalo, Catalina Duque & Casey Malone



What's your favorite part about the rotation?

Casey: I've really enjoyed the nutrition education tabling. It's been a good opportunity for us to get face time with the student-athletes and better understand what their questions are. I've appreciated seeing the themes that emerge as well as the nuances that come up for different sports.

Catalina: I enjoy the counseling sessions because you get to practice all the steps of a consultation session and see how a dietitian addresses the

struggles and difficulties of students. Seeing student-athletes face-to-face allows us to really put what we know to the test.

What's the biggest thing you've learned?

Catalina: I've learned about nutrition for sports injury and how to support those struggling with eating disorders. You hear about these topics in class but actually seeing it happening in front of you helps you better understand the profile of what it looks like. I've realized how challenging it is navigating recommendations for someone with an ED and how much of it is psychological.

Casey: I've learned how to isolate nutrition recommendations instead of prioritizing too many goals at once in order to make change more sustainable. To enact change it's important to listen to what part of it is noise and what part is the actual need. For example, if an athlete is concerned about how many calories they're consuming, maybe in practice the RD is more focused on protein or how to read nutrition labels in order to attain that goal.

NYC Public Schools - Food Service Rotation with An Vo



Pictured from left to right, An Vo & Emma Laudisi

What is your day-to-day like at your rotation?

Mondays are on the field at a different school each week. Every school is different which can affect the agenda for that day. One week we visited a school that was all Halal and another week was a special education school which required all the food to be pureed. But I will typically assist with checking inventory, prepping school lunch, and observe any staff training or issues that need to be addressed by management. On Thursdays, I'm at the field office and helping with presentations and other administrative work. I've also helped in the test kitchen on these days and participated in taste tests with students for new school lunch recipes.

What's your favorite part about the rotation?

My manager, Ms. Lang, is so receptive and supportive of my goals. At the beginning of my rotation, she asked, "What do you want to get out of this?", and I expressed that I really admire how NYC does their school lunch and emphasized that I want to get different experiences. The fact that I made this known enabled us to visit a different school each week. She's really held up to my interests and has done a great job of pointing out things for me to learn and remember along the way. Her flexibility and willingness to go with the flow allowed me to learn so much in such a short time. I've also enjoyed all the fun food!



What's the biggest thing you've learned?

I've learned how difficult it is to implement policy and school food regulations from the top down. For example, the management team and other higher-ups may know why we need a vegetable or salad at lunch but it's very easy for information to get lost at the bottom of the line by the time it reaches school cooks and other staff. I've realized the importance of clear communication and proper training to ensure that all parties involved understand the importance and value of food policies. This experience has emphasized for me why nutrition education is so important!

