

## **Exams a study in bad diets**

### **Jamie First**

As students face their final weeks of VCE exams, a study has revealed that young people are turning to junk food and energy drinks to make it through the testing period.

The more stressed students are, the less likely they are to make healthy eating choices, a survey conducted by Meat and Livestock Australia found.

The study showed, according to their parents, more than one in two 17- to 23-year-olds who are sitting, about to sit, or have recently completed their school qualifications, had diets high in sugar and fat.

The CEO of Headspace, the national youth mental health foundation, Chris Tanti, said junk food can make stress worse.

"There is a lot of pressure on young people," Tanti said.

"We make a big deal of this time of year and a lot more rides on it than, say, when I was younger ... but I guess we are living in a much more competitive society.

"It can lead you to do things that you wouldn't ordinarily do."

He said the impact could be extreme and includes suicide.

Tanti emphasised the importance of sleep as a way of monitoring and controlling mood, while physical activity also had major benefits.

'Even something as simple as going for a half-hour walk or a 15-minute run will help mitigate the intense feelings of anxiety," Tanti said.

'There's no point going hard at something for prolonged periods because your concentration diminishes. You may as well take a break and do something constructive."

He said balance and structure during exam time was vital and suggested young people not "fall off the wagon" when it came to what they put in their mouths."

Dietitians Association of Australia spokeswoman Lisa Renn agreed and said kids are mimicking adults.

"I find it sad. They learn these behaviours. Emotional eating and eating in times of stress is a real issue," Renn said.

She said a good study timetable and mapping out regular food breaks were essential.

"One huge key to healthy eating and managing stress is being prepared.

“Get thinking about what you’re going to need to have in the pantry and put it together in the morning so it doesn’t have to be something extra you’ve got to do.”

She recommended fruit and vegetables, nuts and wholegrain, high-fibre biscuits to nibble on during the day.

“A dairy-based snack, such as yoghurt, or even a milk-based coffee like a latte or cappuccino is fine.

“The caffeine can help with alertness and the milk helps with a bit of protein and carbohydrates for energy. There’s room for one of two of those a day.”