

SNAP Challenge Day #4: How It Feels

September 16, 2013



We have all had days when we were too busy to eat. I'm thinking of a morning last week when I was rushing to get my kids out the door for school and forgot to grab my breakfast on the kitchen counter. It threw my whole day off. I didn't eat lunch until about 3 p.m. and my day proved to be long, exhausting and, ultimately, less productive because my body wasn't fueled.

Imagine if this was your reality all the time – the headaches and light-headedness brought on by low blood sugar; the inability to concentrate; the cranky change in demeanor; and the overwhelming need to take a nap. For millions of Americans struggling with food insecurity, this is life.

This week, through [my participation](#) in the SNAP Challenge, I have had a glimpse into how detrimental and all-consuming hunger can be – and I'm barely halfway through my merely seven day challenge. I can't stop thinking about food. You probably think I'm joking (or think that must be normal for me since I work for a food company after all), but I promise you it's not. Over the last few days, my thoughts have been consumed by food. When is my next meal? How

much food is left in my cabinet? Will it get me through the week? What should I spend my remaining few dollars on? What would I eat if I had no budget at all?

Each night, when I go to bed, I'm engulfed by a sick feeling that comes from eating too many carbs. The cereal and pasta that have made up the bulk of my diet (mixed with the water that I'm consuming to try to mask the hunger) leave me feeling bloated...yet not really full. It doesn't make going to bed much fun. I have also been uncharacteristically cranky. A few nights ago, my wife, Nancy, and I had a tense back and forth after I snapped at her for over-portioning my spaghetti. I felt so much anxiety about the possibility of running out of pasta that I completely overlooked my wife's good intentions in helping to prepare my dinner. I have to imagine that this is a common source of conflict in households marked by food insecurity.

In trading stories with a colleague who is also participating in the Challenge, it struck me that we are both feeling an underlying sense of resentment. For me, it was triggered by driving past restaurants I normally frequent. For him, it was triggered by quantifying the price difference between branded and off-brand foods. These are small examples, but there have been instances throughout the week that made us feel like outsiders. Imagine if these feelings were reinforced day after day, month after month. There is no doubt that it would be demoralizing.

As a father of two school-aged children, I can't help but think about how hunger would impact them. What are the potential long-term consequences? Science tells us that, without adequate nutrition, children can be physically and mentally underdeveloped. The recurring hits on their self-esteem are undoubtedly equally damaging. With roughly 16.7 million children living in food insecure households, the disadvantages facing these kids ultimately serves to perpetuate a cycle of poverty and food insecurity, which, to me, really underscores the urgency of the problem.

On Feeding America's website, there are a [series of videos](#) detailing the impact of food insecurity. Please take a moment to watch. You will learn about the effect of hunger on careers, physical and mental health, and the health of families.

For tips on what you can do, visit www.hungeractionmonth.org and, as always, feel free to share your thoughts in the comments.