

# This \$5.74 Meal Improves Mental Health

*After reading that the most popular, lowest cost lunch in San Francisco is a \$6 steamed bun filled with SPAM, I challenged a college intern to create a \$6 meal.*

BOULDER, CO, USA, April 18, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- I challenged one of our college interns to create a \$6 healthy meal. He reports:



The most popular, lowest cost lunch in San Francisco is a \$6 steamed bun filled with SPAM and dipped in gravy, so I challenged one of our college interns to create a \$6 healthy meal."

*Alexia Parks, 23ZIP, Inc.  
CEO/President*

College is always portrayed as the most formative years of a person's life from making new friends to experiencing a plethora of amazing opportunities to strengthen personal skills.

Amidst this, many students find themselves under high levels of stress, anxiety and depression, with studies estimating 60% of all students have met the criteria for one or more [mental health problems](#). As of 2021 this was a 50% increase from 2013. With our own university

constantly coming in top ten lists for most stressed and depressed students, it is evident that something needs to change if we want our students to be healthy and productive.

The approach our school has used is Counseling and Psychological services (CAPS). CAPS is a traditionalist approach to the mental health epidemic in which students sign up for counseling and will get medicated if the psychiatric worker thinks it is fitting. While this is a needed resource for some students it might be time for the University to take a holistic method to combating our student mental health epidemic. The solution I am proposing is not a far fetched snake oil selling point, but instead a quite simple one and that is an investment into healthier food options for on grounds dining.

In 2001 the term Microbiome was coined by Joshua Lederberg. The term is used to describe the 50 Trillion bacteria that inhabit our GUT. These bacteria create neurotransmitters that [reduce anxiety, depression and stress](#) to preventing leaky gut. The microbiome is a complex system. What has already been found is a multitude of health problems due to a lack of soft soluble fiber. The modern western diet as well as the one offered by UVA on grounds dining needs to focus on high fiber meals.

Today, the average American only consumes 12-18 grams of fiber a day while the recommended

fiber intake for a healthy [Microbiome is 25 to 32 grams daily for adult women](#); 30 - 35 g for adult men. The result of this lack of fiber in the diet is an overall increase in metabolic diseases across industrialized countries due to populations that mainly eat highly processed foods.

If a student is looking for a highly nutritious meal pack with soft soluble fiber it would be difficult to find one provided by UVA dining. The best option for healthy eating is "The Castle" which offers the best selection of vegetables. However, because this option is only available in old dorms, it restricts many students in upper classes because they spend the majority of their time attending classes at central grounds. Another option for someone using meal exchange would be one of the salads from Rising Roll. However the drawback to these salads is that the greens they use are iceberg lettuce or romaine, both of which contain far less nutrient value than darker leafy greens like spinach or kale.

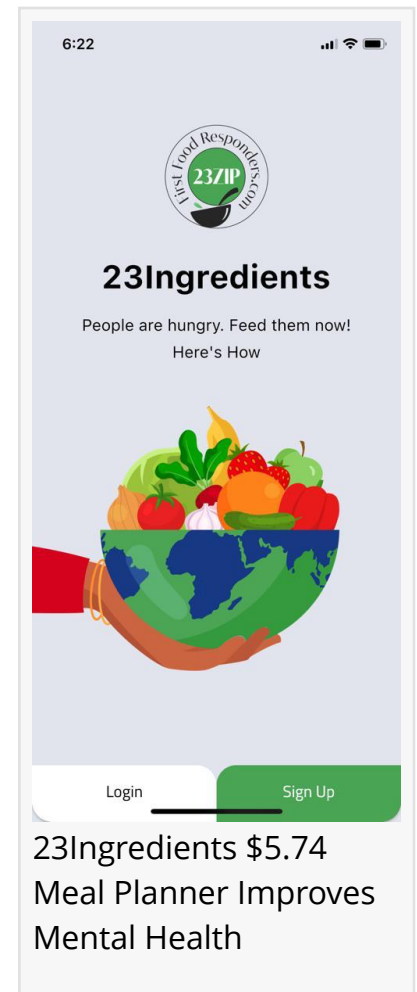
I recently started working for a social enterprise company called 23ZIP First Food Responders, whose mission is to help provide healthy and affordable meals to people living in marginalized communities and in urban or rural food deserts. While working with them I was challenged to create meals which fit nutritional requirements and were as affordable as possible. I decided on two options. First was a dinner salad. I created four portions with nine different vegetables, three fruits and a protein of my choice for \$6.04 per meal. Using the same nutritional requirements and quantities of food I created a bok choy based stir fry for only \$5.74.

Both of these meals were nutritious and delicious. When I talked to one of the people who ate my meal they said that "The stir fry both tasted great and made my body feel good" To me this simple experiment showed me that it is possible to create affordable meals that are also healthy.

It is more evident than ever that our university needs to implement change to sustain a healthy and productive student population. The fast track to change is to implement better access to fiber-rich, nutrient dense vegetables via meal exchanges for all students and faculty on grounds.

Nathan Henderson [Environmental Thought and Practice and Economics '25].

Alexia Parks  
23ZIP, Inc.  
+1 303-443-3697



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