

FRESHMAN 15 – STUDY FINDS MOST STUDENTS GAIN WEIGHT FIRST YEAR

Many students gain more than knowledge during their first year of College. Weight gain for post secondary students is at an all time high. The dreaded “freshman 15” may have been an urban myth in the past but recent studies show that both male and female students gain an average of 9 – 10 pounds their first two years with more than half of the weight gain occurring in the first semester.

Stress, irresponsible nutritional choices, irregular exercise and alcohol consumption were all factors. One study by the American College of Sports Medicine showed that the biggest contributing factor to weight gain was late night eating which accounted for 20% of the students’ daily calorie intake. Students consumed an average of 500 calories, not including alcohol between 8pm and 4 am; Most of it high fat convenience food.

College cafeterias are notorious for serving high fat meals. When given a choice, Students tend to gravitate towards pizza, French Fries and other fried foods. It is not just the choice but the quantity of food that students living in dorms are offered. Even responsible adults, when eating at a buffet, will tend to overeat. Most adults do not have to face a buffet line 7 days per week for weeks on end. Healthy, low fat and vegetarian choices are usually available but it takes a determined student to resist at least some of the cookies, brownies and other desserts that are available daily.

The study showed that even students who lived off campus and prepared their own meals fared only slightly better than their dorm living counterparts. 70% of these students did not consume the minimum amount of fruit and vegetables and fast food appeared to be a regular part of their eating behavior.

Most Colleges and Universities have gym facilities and other recreational opportunities for students. But students have busy schedules and dividing their time between academic and social activities and part time jobs creates little opportunity for exercise unless students make it a priority. Students who were once very active in High School are quickly becoming inactive once they leave home.

Doctors are worried about the long term effects of this behavior if students do not get it under control. There is increased risk for obesity, heart problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, joint problems and cancer. This may be the first generation that does not outlive their parents.

So what can students do and how can parents assist? The Journal of American College Health makes the following recommendations

1. Student keeps only low fat healthy snacks available in their room. Studies showed that students would eat healthy snacks if that was the most convenient option.
2. Students limit their eating after 8 pm

3. Students drink water and consume fruit during the day. Water is calorie free and fruit helps manage urges to eat and provides fiber, vitamins and minerals.
4. Students try to get enough sleep, tiredness lead to overeating and lack of concentration
5. Students try to eat a healthy breakfast to discourage overeating later in the day and provide calcium, folic acid and Vitamin C in their diets
6. Student control their alcohol intake and be aware of the calories in their drinks
7. Students try to introduce low fat and vegetarian options into their diet
8. Students try to get at least 30 minutes of exercise per day
9. Students take part in a sport or recreational activity like a dance class regularly
10. Students continue to exercise through out the holidays and summer.

Many fitness facilities offer reduced rates for students returning home for the summer. City Center Fitness, 399 Main Street, has a summer student membership and offers personal training and fitness testing. Personal trainers can prepare individual work-out plans for students to take back with them to College. There is also a dietician available for private consultations. Call 250 -487-1481 for more details.