

How to Avoid the “Freshman 15”

The summer after your high school graduation draws to a close and you enter the next monumental step towards adulthood as you start college... however, your health is at risk from the infamous freshman 15! Students across every college campus are familiar with this term and the problems it presents. The transition from high school to college provides new pressures such as: a greater demand for time devoted to schoolwork, drinking, eating at strange hours, and boredom snacking. All of these behaviors result in a weight gain known as the “Freshman 15,” referring to the fifteen pounds one gains upon entering their first year of college. Though many experience this change, there are ways to avoid putting on the extra pounds!

Plan Meals According to Your Healthy Lifestyle

Most colleges today offer a meal plan to their campus cafeteria, which means students fall prey to the all-you-can-eat style of lunch and dinners. This is perhaps the greatest contributor to weight gain for incoming freshmen. When attending a cafeteria, it is important to proportion your meats, carbs, fruits, and vegetables appropriately. When deciding what to eat, try to only fill one half of your plate with meats and carbohydrates, while leaving the other half for fruits and vegetables. Also, be sure to begin your meal with these healthy snacks in order to limit the amount of less nutritious dishes consumed.

Take your time when you eat. Rushing to finish your food before the next class can make you overeat and feel bloated. Set aside at least an hour for major meals, leaving room for a few minutes in between returning to the buffet (or only go once!). It is common for students to return to their tables with much more than they could possibly eat, which encourages those few extra bites beyond the point of being full.

Peer pressure to engorge oneself with pizza and other junk foods can also be difficult to resist when attempting to maintain a healthy diet. Don't be afraid to suggest a restaurant with a healthy meal selection. For example, if your friends are in the mood for pizza, suggest a location where a salad bar is also available. Serve yourself a salad then a slice of pizza or two. You could also recommend foods with some degree of nutritional value, such as vegetables, as toppings instead of less beneficial alternatives.

Drinking Moderation

Freshmen, like most college students, may find themselves in a situation where alcohol is present. Beer and mixed drinks come with more calories than many realize. Even light beers can have an estimated one hundred calories per can. In addition to the drink, alcohol can lead to eating excessive amounts of unhealthy snacks such as pizza, chips, and fast food. One cup of water should be drunk with each can of beer or cup of mixed drink to reduce amount of alcohol imbibed, and help hinder food cravings. This could not only help prevent excessive weight gain, but hangovers as well.

Snack Occasionally, but in Small Amounts

Studying, going to class, and walking on campus can build up quite an appetite, but that doesn't mean you should reach for a greasy hamburger or doughnut at the slightest food craving. Cafeteria meal plans often offer access to an array of fruits and vegetables, so why not take one to go? Next time you have a craving for a chocolaty treat, a more healthy option of an apple or banana is readily available.

Keeping healthy food such as yogurt or granola in stock and available within your dorm or apartment can also cut back on intake of more caloric choices. Often we find ourselves saying, "Why should I prepare a salad when I have a pop tart that I can eat on the way?" Snacks in wrappers, while convenient, often come with a gratuitous amount of sugar and preservatives. During the next trip to a grocery store, you can prepare for a healthy snack on the go. A little lettuce, mixed with your choice of vegetables, can be placed in snack sized zip lock bags. When you get hungry, just add dressing, shake, and enjoy!

Reduce Stress, Reduce Weight

College can be a place of great opportunity and enjoyment, but at times it can also leave students feeling stressed. You will find that as the stresses of school accumulate, that leftover Chinese food looks like a real treat at two a.m., or sitting on the couch and watching a couple of hours of television to be a terrific substitute to going for a walk. There are better ways to alleviate stress than comfort food and lounging. Most weathered students will recommend a trip to the gym, or some form of athletics to reduce stress. Hitting a racquetball as hard as you can with a friend does wonders when preparing for that next exam compared to lying on the couch to catch up with celebrity fashion trends. Running and lifting weights can do wonders when trying to mull over relationship issues or drama with friends.

Sometimes, stress can pile up all at once, and make success in school difficult. You may occasionally find it difficult to talk with some of your peers about certain issues. Going to see a psychologist regularly can provide the ideal environment to let off some steam, and develop a plan for success. Visits to a therapist can be the perfect way to organize your thoughts and feelings in a way that lets you better handle your situation. Don't be afraid. The majority of college students have been to a psychologist for one reason or another during their academic career. There is nothing wrong with getting help from a trained professional. Alleviating this stress in a healthy manner will promote a better academic future and a healthier lifestyle without the Freshman 15.

Resources

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/HEALTH/08/26/freshman.15.weight/index.html>

<http://collegelife.about.com/od/beforeyouarrive/qt/avoidthefifteen.htm>