

## **“Freshman 15”**

### **“Freshman 15” – Fact or Fiction?**

Most people have heard and talked about college freshmen gaining weight during their first year in what is known as the “Freshman 15.” Of course, not *all* freshmen will gain weight, because we are individuals. In truth, some students will gain weight, some will remain the same, and some may even lose weight. According to Registered Dietitian, Connie Diekman, the 15 pounds we hear about is an average (1). But according to some studies, the average is more like 4-10 pounds (2). So it appears that the “Freshman 15” is not entirely fact, but not entirely fiction either.

### **Why Do Some Students Gain the “Freshman 15”?**

There are numerous reasons why some freshmen gain 15 pounds or any other amount of weight. The overall theme of these reasons is a lifestyle change for many students. There are changes in routine and responsibility (Mom and Dad aren’t always there to tell you what to do). Specific changes include:

- Skipping breakfast
- Decreased physical activity
- Easy access to unhealthy food... and lots of it
- Stress
- Late-night snacking
- Drinking beverages with a lot of calories, including alcohol
- Little sleep
- Large portion sizes (2)

Some students may never experience these things by managing to continue their previous lifestyle overall. Some students may experience these things at first, but then get back on track. And some may have this lifestyle change and somehow avoid gaining weight, possibly due to their genetics. We are all different and therefore will have different experiences and will react differently to those experiences.

### **If the Freshman 15 Doesn’t Happen for Everybody, Why Worry?**

There isn’t a reason to “worry,” per say, but rather be aware that the transition to college will have an effect on you in many ways, including your health. Some people are sensitive to changes, and may notice soon after that they don’t feel right or don’t look the same. Some may go through the changes mentioned above without noticing consequences right away (such as weight gain), but that doesn’t mean that there aren’t consequences. Bad habits developed now can be difficult to break later and the older you get, the more likely you will notice the side effects of those habits. It can take years of not eating right and not exercising for your body to show signs and by then, it will take a lot more effort to reverse those effects.

Nobody is perfect. Choices will be made along the way that are not the healthiest. By being aware of the consequences of our actions, we can be better prepared for them, or avoid them all together by making other choices.

### **How Can I Avoid the “Freshman 15” or Any Unwanted Weight?**

If you can, prepare yourself for the changes that college life brings by being aware that these changes exist. You won’t be able to avoid everything, but you will have control over many aspects of your new environment. Some tips to help you stay healthy are:

- Do not skip meals! When you skip a meal or a small meal (AKA: a snack), you may tend to overeat at the next meal and may even consume more calories that day than if you ate more frequently.
- Be Active! Take the stairs, walk or ride your bike, take advantage of the Rec Center, join an intramural sport team...
- Choose healthy foods more often. There may be an abundance of food available to you, both healthy and unhealthy. Eat the less healthy foods in moderation.
- Watch out for emotional and social eating. Often when we are stressed, at a party, or up late at night, we eat because we want to eat, not because our body needs the fuel. This type of eating is often the culprit for weight gain because of the types and amounts of foods we eat.
- Be aware of what you drink. Many beverages such as energy and sports drinks, coffee drinks, sodas, alcoholic drinks, and fruit drinks are high in calories. Instead, drink a lot of water and some skim milk, plain coffee, unsweetened tea, 100% fruit juice, and diet soda (in moderation).
- Get some sleep. Not only will you be able to concentrate in class more, but you will be less likely to eat those unhealthy late-night snacks. Plus sleep plays a role in regulating many aspects of our metabolism (3).
- Enjoy your food, but in smaller portions. The amount of food the average American gets served is many times larger than what we should be eating at one meal. Check out USDA's MyPlate to learn about how many portions you might need in a day and what size a portion is at <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>
- Make half of your plate fruits and vegetables. Unless they are deep fried, swimming in butter or syrup, heavily breaded, etc., fruits and vegetables add bulk to your meal without adding many calories. French fries and tater tots don't count!
- Try eating slower. By doing so, you will notice when you begin to feel satisfied, but not stuffed. It takes some time for your stomach to give the signal to your brain that it has had enough.
- Knowledge is power. By being aware of what nutritional value is in foods, you can decide what to and what not to put into your body. Check out the nutrition information on our foods by going to the menus at [dining.unt.edu](http://dining.unt.edu).

### To Sum it up

College-life tends to bring a host of changes into our lives, many of which can affect our weight and our health. Although most students may not gain the proverbial "Freshman 15," there is a risk of gaining some unwanted weight. By learning to make healthy choices, not only can you help prevent yourself from gaining unwanted weight during your freshman year, you can help keep yourself healthy for years to come.

### References:

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