



Students step it up in an aerobics class at the Student Recreation Center.

Dave House, THE BATTALION

THE  
**FIT**  
**FACTOR**

People step out of their homes and into fitness as the battle of the bulge is being fought on all fronts, especially on the student body.

By TAUMA WIGGINS  
 THE BATTALION

With the start of the Texas A&M fall semester, student concerns shift from fun-in-the-sun to back-to-school, and, for many first-time students, avoiding the "freshman 15."

"Freshman 15" describes the weight traditionally gained by some first-semester students. Gorge Villarreal, a fitness and conditioning aerobic running instructor, said that in college, he often observed obsessive behavior in freshman females trying to keep off the "freshman 15."

He said his fellow students had unhealthy expectations about avoiding weight gain.

"They weren't as obsessed with losing weight as they were with the idea of not gaining weight and finding an easy way out," he said. "It was like everything they would do would lead to weight gain."

He said many women are influenced by the supermodel image that is impossible for most people to match.

"College freshman women should realize that many of the (physical) ideals they seek are from supermodels who are one in a million, as well as surgically enhanced," he said.

Villarreal said students experiment with different ways of fighting the "freshman 15." Some, he said, are unsuccessful.

He said weight gain is often the result of overeating "healthy foods" that people think are harmless.

"They need to act sensibly," Villarreal said. "Just because there's a non-fat yogurt machine nearby doesn't mean there aren't any calories (in the yogurt)."

Jeremy Nelms, a strength training instructor, said the primary reason for the "freshman 15" is the extreme change in lifestyle many freshmen undergo.

Nelms said college freshmen who were previously involved in high school athletics, but who are inactive in college, are particularly susceptible to weight gain.

Not all fitness specialists think college freshmen tend to go to extremes.

Ernie Kirkham, coordinator of developmental activities for the Department of Kinesiology, said a small percentage of students go to extremes of weight gain or loss, which are the result of a radically different college lifestyle.

"The image is of people going off to college and going nuts," Kirkham said. "This isn't always true."

He said a majority of students keep up with regular exercise activities after entering college.

"A large percentage of people are continuing in habits they had before college," he said.

Kirkham said that in reality, a limited number of students make a serious effort to increase physical health and fitness.

Kirkham said there is also a small number of students who make up the other side of the coin — those who put forth no effort toward achieving health and fitness goals. He said this can be the result of being out of a disciplined environment for the first time.

"The freedom of college gives them the option to get away (from their regular routine)," he said. "For example, meals aren't held at regular times."

He said college does not necessarily change students into another person, but it brings out

the traits that are already there, including obsessive tendencies.

"If you're obsessive about things, college really gives you the chance to be," he said.

"It magnifies your natural tendencies, and you're away from people who influence you. A work-intense person will reflect this excessive 'work-a-holic-ness' in his study and health habits."

For students with concerns about proper diet and exercise, Kirkham recommends they contact the A.P. Beutel Health Center, the Student Recreation Center, library books with health-related topics and A&M activity classes.

Villarreal said students often complain about not having enough time to work out, but he said students can make time to work out, no matter how busy they are.

"You can find 30 minutes every day," he said. "Students don't realize they are sitting around talking in the hall for at least 30 minutes all the time."

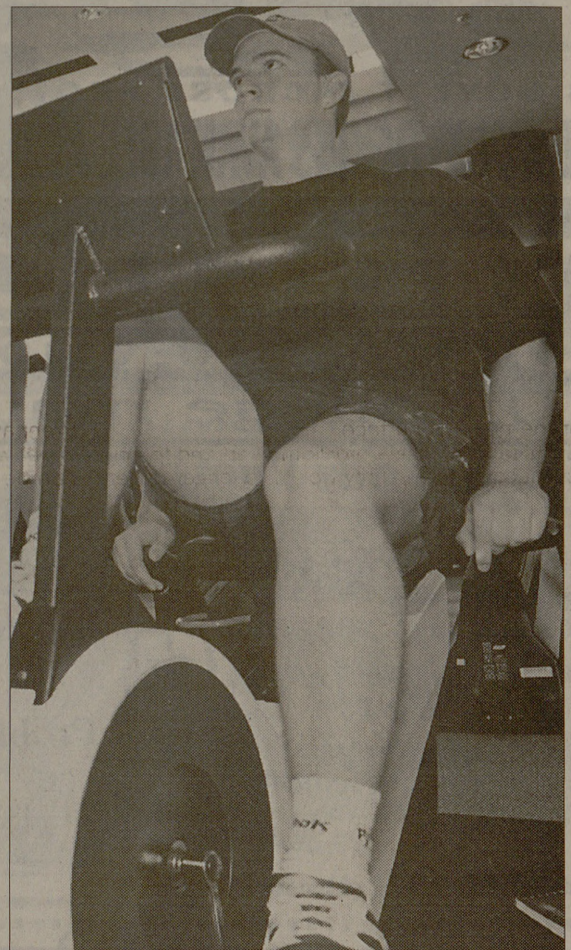
Nelms said building muscle is imperative to physical fitness.

"Personally, I believe strength training is the best way to lose fat," he said. "Lifting weights increases metabolism — for every 5 pounds of muscle, you burn 50 calories. You can burn a lot of calories just sitting around doing nothing."

Kirkham said there are two important things students with health and fitness concerns should remember.

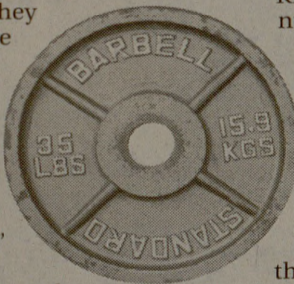
"You must realize improvement doesn't always come easily," he said. "It involves a change of lifestyle more than a change of habit." Villarreal said comparison is the enemy of self-improvements and students should ignore societal pressures to look a certain way.

"The No. 1 thing I would say is not to get obsessed," he said. "It's really not worth it, and if you're unhappy with your physique, it's because someone else in society is telling you that you should be."



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Chris Martin, a senior computer engineering major, works out at the Student Recreation Center



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**Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship Informational Meeting**

September 12 4:00 p.m. 207 Academic Building

**National Science foundation Graduate Fellowships and  
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October 15 6:00 p.m. MSC 228

If you have any questions about any of these scholarship competitions, please contact Djuana Young at djuana@aphonors.tamu.edu or Dr. Susanna Finnell at sflinnell@tamu.edu, or call 845-1957.

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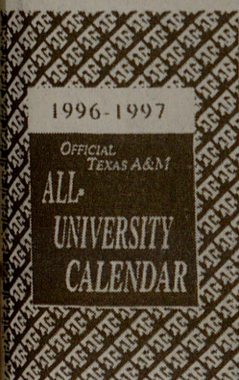
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