

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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Teenage waistline

Increased alcohol consumption, lack of activity can lead to 'freshman 15'

By Jimmy Hissong
THE BATTALION

By the time McDonald's has made the 10:30 a.m. switch from Egg McMuffins to cheeseburgers, graduate student Ken Vincent has already completed a full day's workout. But this is of little concern to Vincent, as exercise and healthy eating have become part of his morning routine.

"I like getting the endorphins flowing early," Vincent said. "There aren't many good excuses not to (work out) at this time, but by the time classes are over, there's a lot of damn good excuses."

Sweatbands and Stairmasters renewed the popularity of exercising in the 1980s. The following decade incorporated a number of dietary considerations into the minds of the masses. In the 21st-century, fast-food chains — long-time enemies of healthy individuals — are continuing to expand their menus to include more nutritious options.

But as time progresses, waistbands progress outward. Carbs and calories are on the tip of everyone's tongue, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention asserts that the American obesity epidemic is worsening rather than improving.

"It's called 'portion distortion,'" said John Prochaska, a graduate assistant for Student Health Services. Prochaska said that many people don't know correct portion sizes.

Ashley Walker, health educator for Student Health Services, said students may try to eat healthier foods, but their assumptions of how much to eat aren't exactly on par with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the inventors of the food pyramid.

The USDA recommends two three-ounce servings of meat a day. "One portion is about the size of a woman's palm," said Walker.

A six-ounce steak is pretty skimpy at any steakhouse, and at roughly four ounces, even one Quarter Pounder is enough meat to satisfy a whole day's requirements — but don't ask how many ounces of meat are in a Double Quarter Pounder.

Some restaurants have altered their menus to appeal to the fad diets that ebb and flow with fashion cycles, but in an effort to appeal to consumers, many of their ideas of healthy servings are skewed. Often times, getting more bang for the buck wins out over receiving smaller, healthier plates of food.

"As children, we're trained to clean our plate," said Rhonda Rahm, the health education coordinator for Student Health Services. "We may be eating healthier, but we're getting fatter since we're eating too much."

Problems concerning weight gain are not noticeably prevalent among the collegiate crowd.

According to a National College Health Assessment of Texas A&M students in the Spring of 2001, 60 percent of Aggies consider themselves to be about the right weight. But to young 18- to 20-somethings with high metabolisms, appearances may not be an authentic projector of health problems faced later in life.

Of course, some long-term consequences are seldom rationalized on a daily basis by anyone. Immediate possibilities weigh far heavier ... about fifteen pounds heavier.

"Really the 'freshman 15' is more like the 'freshman seven,'" Walker said. "I guess the alliteration just sounds better."

Rahm said the seemingly simple change from high school to college alters the habits of most students, resulting in the unwanted weight gain. They often become less active. Generally students stay up later, Rahm said, snacking while studying, and adopt eating habits upon which any mother or father would likely frown. The increase in the consumption of alcohol (however low in carbs) does not help the calories-consumed to calories-used ratio, either, she said.

Each of these symptoms may result in unfavorable weight gain, but overcoming myths regarding dieting and healthy living can greatly reduce the chances for experiencing the 'freshman 15' firsthand.

"Skipping meals slows down your metabolism," Walker said. "If you don't eat breakfast, your body won't break down a big lunch like it should. That's why they call it the most important meal of the day."

Sticking to a well-planned diet and exercising properly can help any student with those 15-pound woes. Each day some 3,200 students visit the Rec Center in an attempt to evade a seven-, 15- or 70-pound weight gain.

"Exercise is a key to weight loss," said DuAnn Woosley, the Rec Sports fitness director. "But it's also the key to feeling better, less stressed and more focused."

The College of Sports Medicine recommends 30 minutes to an hour of exercise on most days of the week.

"What used to be four (days of exercise as the necessary amount) is now five to six," Woosley said.

The Rec Center offers more than 85 classes seven days a week, spanning everything from hip-hop aerobics to balance training to keep exercising fun and entertaining for students.

"Keeping in shape and staying healthy is important to me," said Paige Nitsch, a senior radiological health engineering major. "Working out in the mornings means that I only have to take one shower each day."

Woosley said commitment to nutrition and exercise for life



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requires a daily routine inclusion as a college-aged individual. "The choices you make in college go with you the rest of your life," Rahm said. "Poor habits now can lead to cardiac problems in your thirties and forties or the triple bypass you have when you're fifty."

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