

Texas Obesity Research Center

Health Behaviors Among Students with Different Weight Change Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

Background: Studies have identified various behavioral and environmental factors associated with physical inactivity and unhealthy diet among children and adults. While the lifestyles of college students may be risk factors to the development of an unhealthy body weight, they have not been sufficiently studied in previous research. **Purpose:** Utilizing the dataset collected from a larger project, Campus Environment, Diet and Activity (CEDA), this study examines physical activity (PA), dietary behaviors, and environmental barriers among those who have lost, maintained, or gained weight after living on a campus environment for one year. **Methods:** The pretest data (focusing on past behaviors before moving to campus) and the posttest data (after moving to campus) were collected among incoming freshmen at Texas A&M University during Fall 2008 and Spring 2009 via an online questionnaire. Using the posttest data (N=235), participants were categorized into three groups based on their weight change status, and PA-related, diet-related, and environment-related variables were examined. Descriptive statistics were assessed and ANOVA was used to test differences in three outcome variables. **Results:** Descriptive statistics showed that on average students who gained weight had lower PA levels, had lower fruit and vegetable consumption, and had increased consumption of carbonated beverages (soda), snack chips, vending machine food, and fast food meals compared to students who lost or maintained weight. However, based on ANOVA, only several variables were marginally significant ($p < 0.2$) within the groups. Demographic factors such as ethnicity, personal income, employment status, gender, and others were not associated with weight change outcomes.

Conclusions: Few variables were statistically significant with weight change status. Since students form lifestyle habits that may be carried into adulthood, they represent an important population group for interventions that promote healthy behaviors. Further research is needed in order to assess which factors are more statistically significant with weight change among college students.

KEY WORDS: Physical activity, Dietary habits, Built environment, Overweight and Obese