

Texas Obesity Research Center

College Students' Perceived Barriers and Facilitators to Maintaining a Healthy Bodyweight

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ABSTRACT

Background: It has been evident that on average college students experienced excess weight gain as they transitioned from high school. **Purpose:** The objectives of this study were to qualitatively explore college students' perceived barriers and facilitators to maintaining a healthy bodyweight and identify the key modifiable factors underlying unhealthy behaviors. **Method:** The study employed photovoice (PV), a qualitative research method, in undergraduate students in South Texas. Participants took pictures and wrote descriptions of three perceived barriers and three facilitators to maintaining a healthy body weight; they were then asked to choose one of each for discussion. Eight focus groups were conducted with 96 participants and were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Qualitative analysis was sequential, utilizing a combination of editing and immersion crystallization. **Results:** We were able to identify an array of common perceived facilitators and barriers to maintaining a healthy body weight among college students. Common barriers included time constraints, peer influences, unhealthy vending machine options, high cost of and limited access to healthy foods, obesogenic campus infrastructure, cultural environment, and social norms. Common facilitators included social support, access to a campus recreation center, having a variety of physical activity options available, health education classes, acting as a role model for their children, health benefits through work, sidewalks and staircases around campus, and the ability to pack healthier foods from home to take to campus. **Conclusion:** This study highlights the need for policy and environmental changes on college campuses such as: more affordable and accessible variety of healthier food options; meal heating and refrigeration facilities; bans on unhealthy vending content; and mandatory physical and health education. Social marketing campaigns and support groups

would facilitate a shift of cultural and social norms toward a health promoting attitude.

KEYWORDS: Obesity, Prevention, Young Adult, Qualitative Research, Life Style