



'Freshman 15' largely a myth, but be wise

I just started college and I know my eating patterns have changed dramatically from when I was living at home. I'm worried about gaining the "freshman 15." What can I do to stop from gaining weight?

In today's culture, with so much concern about increasing rates of obesity and the potential health-related risks that carries, it's hard for anyone not to be concerned about gaining weight -- and first-year college students are hardly an exception.

The good news is that the "freshman 15" is largely a myth. While you might gain weight, of course, studies show that it's not normally nearly that much. In fact, a study in the *Journal of American College Health* in 2006 found that not all students gained weight; those who did averaged a gain of less than seven pounds.

Still, gaining seven pounds a year over the course of many years is not something to look forward to. Here are some tips that you might find helpful:

- Keep up the exercise. Another study in the *Journal of American College Health* — this one in 2008 — found that college women who gained weight tended not to be consuming more calories, but they did decrease their activity levels. If

you find yourself sitting more than you used to — whether it's in class, studying, or additional screen time — find ways to build in more activity. Schedule regular visits to the campus rec center, or just take a brisk 10- or 15-minute walk three or four times a day.

- Watch the empty calories you consume. High-sugar soft drinks and coffees, potato chips and other snack foods, and alcohol often are primary culprits. Eliminating them, or at least cutting back, could have a big effect on reducing calories.

- Avoid supplements or fads that promise quick and easy weight loss results. Many people don't realize that dietary supplements aren't regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, and many over-the-counter weight-loss remedies have not been tested either for their effectiveness or their safety. They may contain stimulants that could become addictive. Most people who adopt a fad diet see some weight loss only to have it recur later. Take sensible steps to achieve your goals.

Looking for more? The Nemours Foundation's Center for Children's Health Media offers great guidelines in "Beating the Freshman 15" on its TeensHealth website: http://kidshealth.org/teen/school_jobs/college/freshman_15.html.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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