

The Perception of College Students about a Healthy Lifestyle and its Effect on their Health

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Abstract

Health is an aspect of life that is essentially one of the important factors in basic human performance. Health contributes to general well-being and overall lifestyle. This study examined the perception of college students from Kuwait University about a healthy lifestyle and its effect on their health. A healthy lifestyle was measured by diet, exercise, and sleep. For the purpose of the study, a questionnaire was administered to the participants, which included 150 undergraduate college students from Kuwait University, who represented a range of ages, and gender. Computer data entry and analysis was done by using (SPSS).

The results of the study illustrates that the majority of college students conduct a moderate healthy lifestyle, only (50.0%) eat a healthy diet, and (48.7%) suffer from iron deficiency anemia (IDA), while (46.3%) get at least seven to nine hours of sleep, (38.7%) suffer from increased body weight (obesity), and (34.0%) only exercise frequently. The study shows that a high percentage, (75.8%) do not take blood test, at least once every 6 months, and (74.0%) of the students, do not drink at least two glasses of milk per day. More research is needed to increase awareness between college students about the effect of a healthy lifestyle on their health.

Keywords: Healthy lifestyle; College students; Diet; Exercise; Sleep

Introduction

Health is a universal trait; the World Health Organization defines health as a "state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease.

Health contributes to general well-being and overall lifestyle. In order for a person to enjoy a quality of life, good health habits must be achieved because basic health determines what a person can do.

There are several factors in a person's lifestyle that can make them healthy or unhealthy. Basic diet and nutrition aids a person in many different ways. Eating the correct amount of nutrients is essential for the body's proper functioning. Basic nutrition is the fuel that a body needs to operate.

When students enter college, their diets deteriorate and they gain or lose weight. Meals are often skipped by college students, and management of weight and food intake is often nonexistent or disordered. Class and work schedules change daily as well as every semester. Several factors can be taken to avoid the weight gain and decline in diet quality that may occur during the college years.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the major lifestyle factors among college students, in an effort to improve their behavior and reduce the risk factors for major diseases.

This study contributes significantly in improving the quality of college student's life, and helps them live longer, free from diseases and illnesses.

Today we are facing dietary choices and nutritional challenges, like exotic foreign food, dietary supplements, artificial sweeteners, low fat and artificial fat alternatives, cholesterol-free food products, and different kinds of food with high-protein, or high-carbohydrate, or low-calorie products. College is a particularly challenging setting in which it is difficult to maintain good nutrition. Balanced diets typically go out of the window in the college due to certain unique Today circumstances of college life which include unlimited food access: access of plenty of unhealthy choices in the dining halls, unpredictable meal schedules and patterns, and a stressful lifestyle that may lead to emotional eating. These obstacles can contribute to inadequate nutrients intake.

Healthy diet is the key for current and future good health, even if the students are not over- or underweight, poor nutrition puts them at risk for various medical problems including diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, osteoporosis and iron-deficiency-related anemia, US department of Health and Human Services [1]. In addition, when undernourished, a person may feel unwell on a daily basis, potentially experiencing depression and low immunity.

It is possible to eat a balanced, nutritious diet in college, but it just take some determination and effort. Focusing on the main food groups is very important, incorporating whole grains, brightly colored vegetables and fruits, low fat or nonfat dairy products, lean meats and beans and healthy fats in the diet. At the same time, minimize foods high in saturated and Tran's fats as well as sugary, high-calorie beverages.

Some tips for better nutrition for college students According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,(CDC) [2], avoid skipping meals, keep healthy, take high nutrient snacks on hand, such as nuts,

fruits, low-fat cheese sticks, yogurt, popcorn and pretzels, less candy, chips and other unhealthy foods.

College student's diets often suffer when they go to college; they face a challenge when trying to eat healthy food. Most students have time constraints that make buying, preparing, and eating healthy food a difficult task. There is a distinct move towards fast food restaurants. These eating centers fit students' needs for a fast bite of food between classes. Many fast foods are high in fat and sodium.

Eating poorly for four years of life, will cause malnutrition, and the immediate signs noticed are fatigue, inability to handle stress, and unbearable anxiety. Weight gain is another sign of malnutrition, if not eating healthfully, most people gain weight if they are eating high in calories but poor in nutrients.

Review of Literature

Healthy nutritional choices are necessary for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. In his study, Trockel et al. [3], found a positive relationship between eating breakfast and college student's health. Structured eating patterns help improve students' academic performance. Also it was found that eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia, are more prevalent among female college students than among the general population, Schweitzer.

Sleep is another major aspect in a person's health. College students have been found to be a population that does not get enough sleep as the typical adult population, Buboltz et al. [4]. Sleep is a natural state for human beings when they are tired. Students who were deprived of sleep for 24 hrs were complaining from headaches and they feel weak and tired. Lack of sleeping results in a decrease of student's ability to pay attention, and negatively affects their ability to perform exams, Pilcher et al. [5].

Numerous studies have found that insufficient sleep increases a person's risk of developing serious medical conditions, including obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases. Insufficient sleep has been linked to these and other health problems, and is considered an important risk factor. Sleep deprivation affect college student's health, and their ability to concentrate, Kelly et al. [6].

Not getting enough sleep alters insulin resistance, which is associated with an increased risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, and that can be very quickly induced by a single night total sleep loss, Ann [7]. Insufficient sleep may increase the risk of developing high blood pressure and cardiovascular diseases.

Insufficient sleep increases a person's risk of developing serious medical conditions, which develop over long periods of time and result from a number of factors, such as genetics, poor nutrition, and lack of exercise, Buboltz et al. [4].

Although scientists have just begun to identify the connections between insufficient sleep and disease. In his study, Pate et al. [8] discussed the relationship between Sleep deprivation and disease risk, sleeping fewer than about eight hours per night on regular basis seems to increase the risk of developing a number of medical conditions.

Most experts have concluded that getting enough high-quality sleep may be as important to health and well-being as nutrition and exercise.

Exercise is another aspect that is important to a person's health. The health benefits of exercise are essential for enhancing physical activity and extending healthy life. Being active and doing regular bodily

exercises can prevent major chronic diseases such as heart problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, back pain, osteoporosis, joint pains, obesity, and other diseases, Huang et al. [9].

According to the American College Health Association [10], some of the health benefits of exercise ensure physical and mental health. It boosts the immune system and exercise promotes proper sugar levels in the blood.

Daily exercise and a balanced diet affect overall health and wellness. It is good for the normal functioning of bones and protection against osteoporosis, it help reduce high blood pressure, heart ailments, and even cancer, Anding et al. [11].

College is the absolute best time for students to learn the importance of making time and dedicating energy to a health and fitness program, Keating et al. [12].

The human body needs to move, the many benefits of exercise prove that the act of fitness is more than losing weight, exercise can build confidence, reduce and relieve stress, improve learning and mental health, Leslie et al. [13].

Healthy and active individuals are generally those with stronger immune system and are less likely to catch colds and viruses. Research has shown that regular exercise can boost one's mood and relieve stress, in addition to all the physical health benefits of exercise, Wallhead et al. [14].

Good nutrition is a prerequisite of growth and critical for socio-economic development. College students need to have a healthy diet, which includes a variety of food, to provide them with the amount of proper nutrients their body needs. Low calcium intake and vitamin D deficiency cause low bone mass (osteoporosis) and other bone diseases.

Iron deficiency anemia (IDA), is the most wide spread nutritional deficiency. Iron has several functions in the body. It serves as a carrier of oxygen as hemoglobin and as an integral part of enzyme systems especially of respiration.

According to Budd et al. [16], adequate nutrition, i.e., balanced dietary intake, is the right proportion of food nutrients needed for growth, energy and maintenance. Malnutrition is a pathological state resulting from a relative or absolute deficiency or wrong proportion of essential nutrients. College students do not take into account the seriousness of their health behaviors.

Some studies indicate that difficulty in academic performance, as a result of some unhealthy behavior. If basic health is not achieved then college students will encounter problems, not only physically but mentally as well, Trockel et al. [3]. Ultimately, if college students' health is not complete, then they will not perform to their potential in their studies.

Other research has found that there is very little compliance to the USDA dietary guidelines among college students, Anding et al. [11]. There should be more emphasis on improving dietary habits between college students. This emphasis should be given in the college, because the eating habits that a person has in college will usually, continue into adulthood.

College campuses should have programs that target the student's daily food consumption, such as the quality and quantity of the food they eat. According to Trockel et al. [3], when making breakfast and lunch choices, the following is recommended:

- Eat foods high in protein

- Eat fruits or drink fruit juice
- Eat vegetables or drink vegetable juice
- Eat food such as cereal or bread, which are sources of grain and fiber.
- People need to eat when they are hungry.
- They eat to obtain the nutrients that are necessary for good health.
- A person does not need to eat to manage stress.
- A person does not need to eat when tempted by the site or smell of food.
- A person does not need to eat when feeling rejected, depressed, anxious, bored, or lonely.
- A person does not need to eat to waste time at a place he/she feels uncomfortable.

The following are poor choices of breakfast and lunch for college students:

- Skipping foods that are a source of protein.
- Surviving on a doughnut, sweet roll, or candy bar.
- Eating fatty foods, greasy foods, or fried foods.
- Pigging out on salt- cured foods.

Methodology

The study was conducted among undergraduate college students from Kuwait University, in an effort to examine their perception about a healthy lifestyle and its effect on their health. Information was collected via a lifestyle questionnaire, a standard survey tool by Harris [15]. Computer data entry and analysis were undertaken by using SPSS/PC (statistical package for the social sciences). Data analysis included frequency distributions, percentages, means and standard deviations. The questionnaire consists of two sections. The first section requested demographic data including the student's gender and age. The second section of the questionnaire consists of nine aspects to measure college student's lifestyle and its effect on their health.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to the students in the college of Education at Kuwait University.

Results

One hundred and fifty college students completed the questionnaires, a 100 per cent response rate of which 67.3 per cent were female and 32.7 percent were male. The gender means score was (1.67) and the Std. D was (.471). The student's age range from 18 to 26 years in the following age groups: 93 students (63.7%) were between 18 and 21 years, and 38 students (26.0%) were between 22 and 24 and 15 students (10.3%) were between 25 to 26 years old. The age Mean score was (1.47) and Std. D was (.676).

Characteristics	No. of participants	%
Gender		
Male	49	32.7
Female	101	67.3
Age		
18-21	93	63.7

22-24	38	26
25-26	15	10.3

Table 1: Shows the profile of the participating college students.

In response to the questions concerning, the perception of college students regarding healthy lifestyle, the results of the study illustrates that, the majority of the college students, conduct a moderate healthy lifestyle (Table 2).

Only (50.0%), admitted that they eat a healthy diet, and (48.7%) agreed that they suffer from iron deficiency anemia (IDA), (48.0%) of the students eat breakfast daily, while (46.3%) get at least seven to nine hours of sleep, (40.0%) of college students drink 8 glasses of water per day. In addition, (38.7%) admitted that they suffer from, increased body weight (obesity), and only (34.0%) exercise frequently.

Independent Variables	Percentage%			
	Yes	No	Mean	SD
Suffer from iron deficiency anemia	48.7	51.3	1.51	0.501
Suffer from increased body weight	38.7	61.3	1.61	0.489
Exercise frequently	34	66	1.66	0.475
Eat balanced diet	50	50	1.5	0.502
Perform blood test every six months	24.2	75.8	1.76	0.43
Eat breakfast daily	48	52	1.52	0.501
Drink two glasses of milk per day	26	74.2	1.74	0.44
Get seven to nine hours of sleep per night	46.3	53.7	1.54	0.5
Drink eight glasses of water per day	40	60	1.6	0.492

Table 2: Shows the perception of college students about a healthy lifestyle.

The study shows that (75.8%) do not take blood test at least every 6 months, and (74.2%) do not drink at least two glasses of milk per day.

The highest mean value was (1.76) for performing a blood test at least every six months and the standard deviation was (0.430).

Discussion

The results of the study show that the majority of college students at Kuwait University conduct a moderate healthy lifestyle. It was found that a high percentage of the students are unaware about the importance of taking the routine physical test and blood test at least every six months, to check if they have any medical problem. College students do not take into account the seriousness of their health behaviors, Budd et al. [16].

In addition, it was found that most of the students do not drink at least two glasses of milk daily, and they are not aware that, low calcium intake and vitamin D deficiency, are the main causes of low bone mass disease (osteoporosis), and other bone diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A high percentage of students suffer from Iron Deficiency Anemia (IDA), it is the most widespread nutritional

deficiency that affect student's health because most of them don't eat a balanced diet.

The study shows that most college students do not care about eating daily breakfast, their diet is not ideal, commonly consisting of cheap, and quick meals, snacks, and soft drinks. All easy access to unhealthy foods on campus, contribute to weight gain or emotional strain, Harris [15].

The study shows that a high percentage of the students, do not exercise frequently, and suffer from increased body weight (obesity). The human body needs to move, the many benefits of exercise prove that the act of fitness is more than just losing weight. Exercise build confidence, reduce and relieve stress, improve learning and mental health, and can build healthy relationships around with common interests in well-being, US department of health and human services, healthy people.

The study illustrates that most college students do not care about drinking water, which may cause dehydration and affect their kidney function, and may cause other health problems.

College students should focus on consuming a balanced diet, staying hydrated, and getting adequate amount of sleep, together with exercise and a healthy lifestyle will ensure both physical and mental health.

Conclusion

The outcome of this study is of great concern to public health. Most students attending Kuwait University, college of Education, conduct a moderate healthy lifestyle, which will affect their health; therefore, it is vital that additional in-depth research is conducted on college student's healthy lifestyle factors, and to extend the study to the other colleges and universities in Kuwait.

We conclude from this study that a high percentage of the college students at Kuwait University are not aware about the results of unhealthy behavior, which may cause different health problems.

There should be further studies to investigate the effect of healthy lifestyle on college student's health, their academic performance and the difficulties they will encounter because of unhealthy diet, sleep and exercise. Also there should be more awareness between college students about conducting healthy behavior. The findings of the study

pave the way for other researchers to conduct future research in the area of healthy lifestyle among college students.

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