

Title: An assessment of the nutritional adequacy of student diets.
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Research suggests that student populations from around the world may be at particular risk of poor nutrition (Makrides *et al* 1998). However, there appears to be little evidence of nutrition based health promotion interventions specifically targeting this group. The aims of this study were to investigate the canteen food choices of students studying at a fully catered campus of the University of Nottingham, and assess the standard of meal provision offered to these students

Food frequency and opinion based questionnaires were distributed to all students (n=214) who dine in the campus canteen. 129 questionnaires were returned. Adequacy of meal provision was assessed by completion of the Heartbeat Award Scheme questionnaire (HEA 1990). Results were analysed using a statistical software package. Gender differences in the responses obtained were investigated using chi-squared tests.

According to self-reported weights, 36.2% of males and 5.6% of females were classified as overweight (BMI >25kg/m²). Only 7% of males and 10% of females reported to consume 5 portions of fruit and vegetables /day. Cooked breakfasts were consumed at least once per week by 74% of students. 80.8% of students reported to consume chips at least once per week. Significantly more females reported to very rarely/never consume cooked breakfasts and chips (p=0.002; p=0.001, respectively). Students reported that their consumption of fried and snack foods, chips and processed meat had increased since coming to university. Lack of food choice was cited as the main reason for these changes. The student canteen at SB failed to meet 5 of the 10 criteria necessary to obtain the Heartbeat Award, largely due to the frequent use of saturated fats in recipes.

Lack of available healthy options, in combination with unhealthful food selections are leading students to consume diets high in saturated fat and low in fruit and vegetables. The diets of male students appear to be particularly poor. Such gender differences in food choice have been observed in previous similar studies of student populations (Mooney & Walbourn 2000). Poor diets and overweight trends may put young people such as those surveyed at increased future risk of major medical problems.

The many influences on food choice and availability specific to this growing section of the population suggest there could be opportunities for health promoting activities working with this group. This study highlights the need for nutritional intervention to form part such activities.

References

- Makrides L , Veinot P, Richard J, McKee E, Gallivan T (1998). A Cardiovascular Risk Assessment of Students Living in Residence. *Canadian Journal of Public Health* **89**: 171-175.
- Mooney KM & Walbourn L (2001) When college students reject food: not just a matter of taste. *Appetite* **36**: 41-50.