**Student Health 101: Shifting College Students’ Dining Habits** by Kendall Hiti

There has been an overwhelmingly large amount of content in recent years about the rise of obesity, how it has turned into an epidemic and health care crisis in the US, and how poor eating habits can lead to disease. However, there isn’t a significant amount of research done about college students health habits and ways to combat the lack of nutritional value in their food intake.

**The Problem: College Students Food Habits**

Based on primary research from surveying a few Elon Seniors and secondary research from credible online sources, it is apparent that lack of time is a big concern for student’s efforts to eat healthy. They also admitted to eating fast food on occasion because of the convenience.

According to a study done by the American College Health Association, only 7.3% of students ate five or more servings of fruits or vegetables daily, which is the daily recommended amount. The transition to college life tends to worsen dietary habits for students which can lead to weight gain, especially during the first year. This is commonly called the freshman fifteen.

Other factors that contribute to poor eating habits among the college aged demographic include a higher rate of stress, and a lower rate of self-esteem. Studies have also collected data on students having a low level of nutritional knowledge which allows for the gathering of inadequate information.

**Mindful Eating 101**

Mindful eating is the best way to shift your food choices because it doesn’t take time away from classes, homework, club meetings, or social events. College students are labeled in society as mindless eaters. This could be because of the unlimited buffet lines, greasy junk food that is easily accessible, and the weight gain people see in college students.

The problem is less the fact that there is endless food provided at dining halls and a multitude of drive-thru fast-food restaurants, but the media portrayal of unhealthy body images. A big portion of college students struggle with mindless overeating, dieting, skipping meals, body image problems, or don’t eat enough of the right nutrients.

Mindfulness, or being present in every moment by engaging in activities such as meditation and relaxing practices, can positively change the way people think. When a person is aware and present, they make better decisions rather than falling into old habits. A few studies have shown that when people practice mindfulness, they experience a shift in alpha brain waves which is correlated with a state of relaxation.

**Suggestions**

Since being mindful of the food you are eating can help you make healthy choices, this leads to better overall health as well, including improving the six dimensions of mindfulness (physical, purpose, social, financial, community, and emotional). College students need to work on this practice rather than worrying about drastically changing their diet, trying out diet plans and fads that may work for a short period of time but are hard to maintain, and skipping meals.

In addition to practicing mindful eating, there are a few other habits students can take on to improve their overall health. For all students, especially upperclassmen with no meal plans, being organized and spending a bit of time planning out your meals each week is extremely important.

Going to the grocery store with a plan of buying only the ingredients you will need for that week of meals will not only save you time, but money. From there, meal prepping will also save a lot of time during the week, and gives those with busy schedules no excuse not to cook healthy meals at home. Going out to dinner for some meals is completely acceptable, but be aware of what you order, making sure that it is something that you will not feel guilty about or regret after.

**Works Cited**

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