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Avoiding freshman weight gain

Early one morning this week, I was walking through the Okanagan College parking lot and noticed a young female student jogging through the campus.

It was great to see a student up that early exercising, especially since recent studies have shown that many first-year students can gain up to seven kilograms (15 pounds) during the school year.

This weight gain is such a well known phenomenon that even Wikipedia has a page devoted to the "freshman 15," which outlines how this term is applied to first-year college and university students who gain weight.

The weight gain is attributed to increased alcohol intake, the consumption of high fat and high carbohydrate food found in cafeterias (also known as very little fruit and vegetables) and limited physical exercise.

Some dieticians also attribute the weight gain to lack of sleep, which



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can cause overeating.

This phenomenon is interesting in that you usually don't expect weight gain in your early 20s and you don't see the same patterns with young adults who are out in the workforce.

When I was attending university in my early to mid-20s back in the 1980s, I had a hard time keeping weight on.

In fact, when I look back at those days, most of my friends were more concerned about getting enough food to eat than getting too much.

Mind you, most of use lived off-campus in rented apartments with in walking distance from school.

Yet those who did live on campus didn't seem to

gain a lot of weight either.

I recall living off a tight food budget that included simple breakfasts, brown bag lunches and cooking my own dinners. Going to the college cafeteria for lunch was a luxury, as was pizza, fast-food and beer.

The only thing we didn't do was exercise—I don't recall too many of my peers taking fitness seriously, but we were by no means overweight.

So I can't help but wonder how new is this freshman 15 phenomena? How long has it been around and what has occurred in the last 10 years for this trend to emerge?

Could this have happened because we now have parents who have raised a generation of young adults who skip breakfast, don't pack a lunch and find it easier to order pizza for dinner than cook?

Is this generation's lack of cooking skills leading them away from

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kitchens and into the meal plans offered by their school cafeteria just because it is that much easier?

And finally, how much has the fast-food industry and campus pub life infiltrated our campus cultures?

I suspect the freshman 15 could be the start of a new campus planning initiative.

Now that more colleges and universities are adopting green building codes, maybe the next step will be green nutrition.

Ten years from now you may see no more baked goods, residences with communal gardens, and the pub may be converted to a tea house and yoga studio.

My husband always tells me that his biggest problem in college was giving up food money to buy beer. Beer may have some significant calories but you can't live on beer and expect to do well in school.

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