

FIGHTING THE “FRESHMAN 15”

The first year of college is an exciting time of change: you may be living in a new city and/or a new residence; you’re attending a new school with new classes; and, for the first time, you’re almost on your own. However, one change you definitely **don’t** want is a change in your waist line!

How does it happen?

All-you-can-eat dining halls, weekend parties (with a bit too much drinking and munching), skipping meals due to busy schedules (and then overeating later), late-night pizza runs, and stress-eating all contribute to excess pounds put on by first-year students. It costs 3500 extra calories to gain 1 pound of fat. Broken down, that’s just 145 extra calories per day (above what your body needs) to gain 15 pounds of fat over one year!

Is the “Freshman 15” an inevitable phenomenon?

NO!!! While in college, you have the opportunity to eat very well or very poorly. It’s all up to you! Here are some easy tips for fighting the “Freshman 15.”

- *If you’ll be living on campus and dining in residential restaurants, resist going back for seconds and thirds.* All-you-can-eat meals may sound like a dream come true for budget-strapped students, but you’ll pay for it later when you have to buy a whole new wardrobe. Fill your tray **ONCE** with **one** healthy entree complemented with **one** piece of fruit, **one** salad, **one** roll and/or **one** small dessert. No need to stuff your self--the same food will be there tomorrow.
- *Eat slowly and savor your food.* It takes 20 minutes for your brain to get the message from your stomach that you’ve had enough to eat. So, if you eat too fast, you easily can consume excess calories before the sense of fullness sets in. During meals, put your fork down between bites, sip water, talk with friends, or read a book...anything to help you slow down.
- *Choose low-fat foods.* Gram for gram, fat has more than twice the calories as either protein or carbohydrate (fat has 9 cal./g, while protein and carbs have only 4 cal./g.). So, if you choose a lot of high-fat foods, it’s easy to pack in extra calories and gain unwanted pounds. Use the table below to guide your food choices.

	Go easy on these:	Choose these more often:
high fat “extras”	butter, margarine, oil, regular salad dressings, mayonnaise, cream sauces, gravy, *guacamole, *peanut butter, sour cream, and cream cheese	herbs, spices, low fat salad dressings, seasoned vinegar, lemon juice, soy sauce, mustard, ketchup, tomato sauces, salsa, jam, and honey
high fat milk products	whole and 2% reduced fat milk, cheese, and ice cream	1% low fat and fat free milk, yogurt, and cheese, nonfat frozen yogurt, and sherbet
high fat meats and other protein-rich foods	most beef, pork, and lamb products, whole eggs, *nuts and seeds, *peanut butter, hot dogs, bacon, pepperoni, and sausage	skinless chicken and turkey breast, fish, beans, egg whites, lean meats (round or loin cuts, ham, and Canadian bacon)
high fat snacks and desserts	cookies, cakes, pies, pastries, candy, donuts, and potato chips	graham crackers, fresh fruit, air popped popcorn, pretzels, rice cakes, bagels, low fat granola bars or sports bars
high fat cooking methods	fried, sautéed, creamed, au gratin, escalloped, breaded	baked, steamed, grilled, poached, roasted, broiled, barbecued

* High in “heart-healthy” unsaturated fat.

- Keep in mind that fat-free (or carb free) doesn't mean calorie-free. Fat-free muffins, frozen yogurt, and other snack foods often contain so much sugar that they are calorically equivalent to their full fat alternatives. For example, one Snackwells Fat-Free Devils Food cookie has the same number of calories as a regular Oreo cookie! Plus, we tend to eat more of the fat-free items, thinking they're "healthy." Don't be fooled! Your body converts all excess calories (whether from carbohydrate, protein or fat) to body fat.
- Fill up on high fiber vegetables and fruits. Not only are these foods generally low in calories, but they also are packed with vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients, and fiber (which keeps you filling full). Every day, aim to eat 3 servings of fruit (1 serv. = 1 medium piece or 1 cup of berries/melon) and at least 4 servings of vegetables (1 serv. = 1/2 c. cooked vegetables or 1 c. raw leafy greens).
- Drink more water, and keep other beverages in check. Water is calorie-free, filling, and costs nothing! Drink 1 full glass of water before you start each meal, and you'll be less likely to over eat. Pay attention to how much soda, fruit juice, specialty coffees, and alcohol you drink during the day (and nights), as the calories can really add up. Incidentally, alcohol has almost as many calories as fat (7 cal. per g.), and it actually slows down the body's ability to burn fat for fuel.
- Be smart about late night snacking. Studying late and got the munchies? Beware! It's easy to unconsciously eat a whole bag of chips. Make sure you pre-portion out your study snacks so you know exactly how much you're eating. For better nutrition, keep a stash of fruit, whole grain cereal, low fat popcorn, and other healthy snack foods in your dorm room or apartment. Keep in mind that high protein snacks (i.e. string cheese, low fat cottage cheese with canned fruit, yogurt, turkey slices, edamame, instant bean soups, or a handful of nuts) are good choices since they increase brain chemicals that keep you more alert. (NOTE: High carbohydrate snacks have the opposite effect--they make you more relaxed and sleepy.)
- Eat at regular intervals throughout the day. No time for breakfast and only a quick bite between classes for lunch? Bad move! Without a continuous supply of energy to your brain and muscles, you'll not only feel terrible and impair learning, but you'll also slow down your metabolism. After all, your body thinks it's starving and tries to conserve calories (as fat) in case it is never fed again. Also, after starving all day, you're more likely to over eat later. Try to make time for 3-6 meals/snacks every day. If you have an early morning class, grab a piece of fruit and a carton of low fat yogurt for the road. And, always carry healthy snacks in your backpack just in case you can't stop for lunch. Dried or fresh fruit, whole grain crackers, nuts, string cheese, and low fat granola or sports bars travel well.
- Listen to your body carefully. Pay attention to whether your desire to eat is due to true physical hunger or something else (like stress, boredom, procrastination, sleepiness, etc.). Contrary to popular belief, it is not "bad" to eat late at night if you are really physically hungry. As long as you don't overeat, the calories will be burned (not stored as fat) while you sleep. It's only when you eat due to **non-hunger** reasons at night (or at any time of day) that the extra calories will be stored as fat. Rather than eat when you're bored or stressed, call a friend, listen to music, watch TV, practice deep breathing, or meditate.
- Be active on a daily basis. Exercise not only burns calories while you do it, but it also revs up your metabolism, so you burn more calories while sitting in class all day. In addition, physical activity helps wake you up, reduces stress, may improve your food choices, and is a great way to meet people and have fun!!!