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Avoiding the Freshman 15

by Vicki Salemi

Article provided by *The CollegeBound Network*

Bagels and bread and pastries, oh my! In this carb-obsessed society (Atkins this, South Beach that), what's a weight-conscious college-bounder to do? Although healthy options do exist in the good ol' school caf' (like the fresh fruit and salad standby), tempting late-night cravings still persist, and pizza deliveries are only a phone call away.

"My best advice for college students is to spend as much time planning what to eat as deciding what to wear," advises Cathy Cunningham, human ecology professor at Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tennessee. "The pressure for social acceptance takes priority in any college freshman's life, and eating correctly easily falls by the wayside," she adds.

So, how exactly can you eat right when the cafeteria boasts an assortment of waist-expanding food? Can anyone say "unlimited servings of yummy chocolate chip cookies"? For starters, you can check out the dining hall for healthy food options before filling your tray with the ones you know and love, like burgers and fries.

The truth about the Freshman 15

According to Tanya Horacek, Ph.D., RD, associate professor of nutrition at the College of Human Services and Health Professions at Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York, the Freshman 15 is not just a myth. Many new students gain weight, often due to poor food choices, so you'll need to be dining hall-savvy. She advises hitting the food bars head-on (with the right attitude, of course).

"Take advantage of college as a fresh start to begin new,



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more healthy eating behaviors," says Horacek. And, pay attention to portions. You can still eat what you want, but be careful--especially when you're facing a packed food bar and have access to as many clean plates as you want.

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"Pack a healthy snack to avoid binging on unhealthy food between classes," adds Horacek. Basically, your stomach is at the mercy of dining hall hours, not necessarily of hunger itself. Having a handy snack within reach is essential for healthy eating.

Making healthy choices

Leslie Ekstrand, general manager of Parkhurst Dining Services at Chatham College in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, agrees that it's important to have healthy snacks and meals. "It's just a matter of making healthy choices," she says. To help them make those choices wisely, Ekstrand ensures that her students have access to calorie, carb, and fat counts with every meal at their dining hall and snack bar. Chatham students even have a Great Grains program that boasts vegan whole grain and vegetable protein salads.

If your caf' isn't quite so cutting edge in the health department, never fear! Another huge component of managing your caloric intake is burning it off. Aside from the exercise of walking or jogging, take a trip to your campus fitness center--hey, it's there, and membership is usually included in your tuition fee.

Plus, many centers offer more than cardio machines and weight training, with options like swimming, aerobics, and pickup games at the basketball and volleyball courts. And remember, most gyms on campus serve two purposes: getting in shape and getting social!

Healthy Eating 101

- Try to eat foods that are low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol. (In other words, limit the pepperoni pizza, alright?)
- Drink water! Drink water! Drink water! (Is there an echo in here?)
- Watch your portions. Of course, watch what you eat, but it's also important to pay attention to how much you're consuming.
- While the purpose of the caf' is to serve food to a large number of people during a specified time, you can always ask for specific food based on your dietary needs.
- Watch out for hidden calories like fattening

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salad dressings.

- Get moving! Bike it, rollerblade it, walk it. Stay active!
- Eat a variety of foods. (No, this doesn't mean choosing between Cool Ranch and Spicier Nacho Doritos! We're talking about salads, fruit, meat, eggs, and fish!)
- Eat lots of fruits and vegetables (mom will be so proud).

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