Australian First-Year University Students Are Not Meeting Australian Guide to Healthy Eating Guidelines

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Background/Aims: Evidence from the US suggests increased risk for weight gain among first-year university students (Freshman 15), but evidence in Australia is scant. This study aimed to examine weight and dietary quality of Australian first-year university students over 12-months.

Methods: Twenty-two (5 males and 17 females) first-year university students with a mean age of 21.1 ± 6.8 years were recruited. Body weight was measured monthly and three-day food diaries (two university and one non-university days) were administered three monthly. Diet quality was analysed at zero, six and 12-months via AGHE food-group analysis. Weight and dietary changes over 12-months was analysed using general linear model for repeated measures ANOVA.

Results: Females gained (+0.9, +1.5, +1.2 kg, \( p < 0.05 \)) at 2, 3 and 4-months, respectively, but returned to baseline weight after 12-months. Sodium (2702 mg/d), saturated fat (11.5% of total energy) and sugar (15.8% of total energy) intake all exceeded recommendations. Food group analyses revealed that intakes were not significantly different between university and non-university days, and remained unchanged throughout 12-months, except for lower discretionary sweet foods after 12-months (\( p = 0.03 \)).

Conclusions: First-year university students may not be consuming adequate servings from the AGHE food groups and female university students are prone to weight gain at the beginning of the academic year.

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