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Students often worry about the typical college stressors — getting along with roommates, finding classes, making friends and avoiding the dreaded “freshman 15” weight gain. Good news! The freshman 15 is a myth. There is conflicting research with the exact amount of weight gained during the first year of college, but students seem to gain a moderate amount of weight during and after college. Even better news is that you can take steps to eat healthy and keep your weight in check. College is an adjustment, but it doesn’t have to mean an adjustment in your pant size.

**Be Prepared.**

College is a place with lots of easy access to lots of food, and they usually aren’t the healthiest options. You can be ready by keeping smart snacks in your room or backpack. Monitor the amount of fat, sugars and sodium you ingest, and be sure to incorporate enough fruits, vegetables, protein and other nutritious foods in your diet. One tip is to stock your dorm-room fridge with a variety of healthy foods such as apples with peanut butter, carrots and hummus, and Greek yogurt or fruit and whole-grain cereal.

Many freshmen are living away from home for the first time, and this can stir up unpredictable emotions. Stress, anxiety and homesickness can all lead to overeating. Before you snack, ask yourself if you’re eating out of boredom or soothing yourself with food. If you’re stressed, anxious or feeling blue, take a study break to chat with a friend, or go on a brisk walk. If stress and anxiety feel unmanageable, look into on-campus student counseling services for assistance.

**Don’t Skip Breakfast.**

Breakfast needs to be a part of our daily routine. Breakfast wakes up the metabolism and provides energy to the brain and muscles for the day’s activities. People who eat breakfast tend to eat less throughout the day than those who skip breakfast. Breakfast should have carbohydrates and some protein to help keep students feel full. Luckily, there are many quick breakfast options for busy college students. A few options for on-the-go students include hard-boiled eggs and fruit, whole-grain toast with peanut butter, a low-fat granola bar and fruit, or a tortilla with hummus and an apple.

**Be Choosy in the Dining Hall.**

Dining halls are full of healthy food options. You just need to know which foods to put on your tray. Great options include foods that are baked, broiled, steamed, grilled or roasted. Steer clear of foods that are buttered, fried, swimming in cream sauce and anything prepared “au gratin.” Another great tip is to be on guard at the salad bar. Most veggies get the green light but limit foods high in fat and sodium such as olives, bacon bits, fried noodles, croutons, and pasta or potato salads that are made with mayo and oil. Stick to fat-free or low-fat dressings on the side.

**Get a Move On.**

Time is a valuable commodity for busy college students. Between classes and studying, it can be difficult to find time to be active; but even if you only exercise for a short period of time, you will feel more energized and better about your health.

For example, many universities have excellent fitness centers available for students. Visit your school’s gym or recreation center and go for a run on an indoor track or grab a basketball and shoot some hoops. Try to vary your routine each time to avoid boredom.

Another opportunity is to try bonding with friends through activity. Encourage friends to partake in activities that don’t necessarily revolve around food, such as intramural sports. Most universities offer classic sports such as basketball or baseball; but some campuses also offer activities such as ultimate Frisbee and bowling.

As you can see, gaining weight during the first year of college is not inevitable. You may have your ups and downs, but a few simple changes to your daily routine can help you fend off excess weight while keeping you physically and mentally healthy. For additional resources check out eatright.org or choosemyplate.gov.