

How Not to Gain the Dreaded 'Freshman Fifteen'

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When fall classes at the University of California, San Diego begin on Sept. 25, freshmen will be on their own for the first time to spend endless hours on the computer, play video games and eat whatever they want, a recipe for weight gain. However, several UC San Diego wellness, weight-management and counseling programs will help students beat the dreaded "freshmen fifteen."

"Although, it's rare that students gain 15 pounds their first year of college, many students do find that they have gained some weight at the end of four years," said Debbie Pino-Saballett, director of Health Education at Student Health Services (SHS). "This is often due to change in activity level and eating habits. Students are active and involved in sports in high school and then they get to college and find it more difficult to fit exercise into their busy schedule."

Pino-Saballett's staff encourages students to incorporate calorie-burning activities into their everyday activities. "We encourage students to take stairs instead of the elevator, avoid the shuttle and walk to campus," Pino-Saballett said. SHS also gives students the opportunity to meet one-on-one with dietitians for nutrition counseling. At the meetings, dietitians conduct a computerized analysis of the students' diets based on their current intake.

Among the SHS efforts, including the Personal Wellness Program, students learn how to avoid unhealthy weight gain by participating in Weekly Weight Management Groups. The meetings are free and give students the opportunity to receive guidance from dietitians, psychologists and physicians on diet, exercise and behavior. Additionally, SHS staff and student health advocates offer healthy cooking demonstrations, workshops and games, such as Nutrition Jeopardy, in the residency halls to teach students how to make healthy food choices.

Students also can get in the best shape of their lives through UC San Diego's recreation department by enrolling in the Wellness Program. The eight-week program consists of an initial physical fitness assessment, entrance interviews with wellness instructors and six weeks of small group training with weekly nutritional advice. This program is free to the first 60 students who register.

James Pura, a senior who enrolled in the course last year, said he lost 15 pounds in eight weeks and vastly improved his cardio fitness and strength. "The wellness program is awesome," he said. "It's taught me so much. I learned how to eat right and how to exercise right. It taught me how to take care of myself for the rest of my life."

The campus recreation department also offers a Weight Loss Solutions program, in which students can receive information from trainers to help adjust their attitudes about eating and exercise. Students who enroll in the eight week program meet at the Recreation Intramural Athletic Complex (RIMAC) once a week for an hour. The program includes small group instructional workouts and nutritional guidelines for weight loss.

Eric Gastelum, a sophomore who enrolled in the Weight Loss Solutions program a year ago, has lost over 50 pounds. He kept in touch with his instructor, Terri Dowie. "His friends who hadn't seen him in a while thought he had had surgery because he looked so dramatically different," Dowie said. "It is an amazing change for a young man."

Students also can stay fit by enrolling in the department's several recreation classes such as yoga, Pilates, dance, meditation, martial arts, cycling and sports clubs.

UC San Diego's Counseling and Psychological Services offers support to students who struggle with their weight or have eating disorders. "We staff a team of professionals who deliver 'state of the art' services geared to foster healthy eating habits and weight management, balanced nutrition and fitness programs, as well as the development of a positive body image and self-regard," Counseling and Psychological Services Director Reina Juarez said. Their services range from blogs and interactive websites to college newsletters and personalized recommendations.

According to staff psychologist Karla Materna, students can maintain a healthy weight by not dieting at all. "Students shouldn't focus on weight and controlling one's body, but rather focus upon living a full life intellectually, physically, spiritually and socially," she said. "We also know that most people who do diet actually end up gaining a few pounds. By having a meaningful and engaging life at UC San Diego, students are less likely to be vulnerable to the emotional and physical roller coaster of dieting."

People sometimes eat in response to anxiety, homesickness, sadness or stress, according to UC San Diego dietitian Becky McDivitt. She added that college students also are prone to poor sleeping habits and fatigue, which can lead to unhealthy food choices.

However, UC San Diego's five full-scale dining facilities offer many choices for healthy nutrition. "Students also can make requests to have their favorite healthy foods or healthy recipes from home to be included in the dining facilities menu rotation," she said. "They can consult with me, a registered dietitian, for no cost. I regularly meet with students to guide them towards healthful eating habits on campus."

In order to promote a nutritious diet, Housing, Dining, Hospitality hosts cooking workshops. Last spring they sponsored a healthy cooking competition at Thurgood Marshall College, one of the six colleges at UC San Diego, a system designed to provide students with the feel of a small liberal arts college plus the advantages of a large research university. During the healthy cooking competition Karen Henwood, a Marshall College sophomore, received top honors for her delectable carrot soup recipe.

"A good long-term approach to weight management is to eat a varied diet regularly and exercise regularly. All things done in moderation," Materna said. "By focusing on overall quality of life, a student is more inclined to like him or herself and enjoy their time at UC San Diego. This university has an enormous range of opportunities for personal growth and challenge, and has many, many resources to support students in a healthy lifestyle."

Students Get Help Living Well

The Student Affairs Wellness Initiative will include the second year of the LiveWell program at Thurgood Marshall College. LiveWell aims to promote wellness in freshman and other students by incorporating body, mind, social and spiritual well-being. Resident assistants in dormitories are trained to promote wellness, and themed programs and a wellness week are designed to promote active lifestyles and prevent unhealthy weight gain. The programs include the free Personal Wellness Program, use of RIMAC facilities, the Weight Management program and nutritional counseling.

Last year, under the Student Affairs Wellness Initiative, Thurgood Marshall College followed 180 freshmen who participated in the LiveWell program and compared them to freshman who did not participate in any additional wellness activities or programs. After one quarter, participants in LiveWell reported better life satisfaction, improved emotional and psychological well-being and less stress compared to non-participants.

LiveWell is part of a larger wellness initiative that Student Affairs will launch this fall to promote healthy behaviors, positive attitudes, integrated programs and healthy lifestyles in students. The Wellness Initiative's mission is to promote the well-being of UC San Diego students by fostering lifelong intellectual, psychosocial,

physical and spiritual wellness and advocating for healthy practices throughout the campus, curricula and community. The Wellness Initiative includes programs from Recreation, Counseling and Psychological Services, Student Health Services, the Center for Ethics and Spirituality, Housing, Dining, Hospitality and Recreation.

"We strive to create a healthy campus community," Wellness Center Director Jerry Phelps, Ph.D., said. "Healthy, whole and vibrant, our students will be prepared to take on an increasingly intense and demanding world, applying and sharing what they've learned in those short yet life-changing years on campus."

For more information on how the university supports student well-being, see the Wellness Center website at <http://wellness.ucsd.edu>.

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