

Lifestyle Habits of University of Wisconsin-River Falls Female Students

Authors:

Alyssa Syrstad, Becca Jordahl, Marta Pedersen

Faculty Sponsor:

Paul Shirilla

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Introduction

There still remain gaps in the research about dieting practices, weight perceptions and body composition among college females. We believe that lifestyle habits are the main factor in creating healthy behavior. There is still more research to be done on this subject, which is what drew us into our study. The purpose of our study is to explore the relationship between healthy lifestyle choices of female college students on the University of Wisconsin- River Falls campus, and their weekly physical activity. We determined this by distributing a questionnaire to 100 college female UWRF students. In doing this research we hoped to find that female UWRF students gain awareness that it is important to practice healthy lifestyle habits. Practicing healthy lifestyle habits is important for females at this age because they are setting a foundation for their lifestyle habits for the rest of their life. We designed this survey to ask questions that the students could easily relate to and answer about their everyday life. We hoped that after taking this survey, the students would start to think about what their habits are like now and how they could change and improve their habits in order to be healthier. We hypothesized that UWRF female students who were more physically active also made other healthier lifestyle choices, such as having a balanced diet, drinking enough water and getting enough sleep, compared to the female students who were not physically active.

Methods

Before our research even started, we completed the IRB application. In doing so, we followed the instructions of the application and proved that our study would not be of

any risk and would be beneficial to the University, as well as the general public. Once we were notified that our research was approved, our data gathering began.

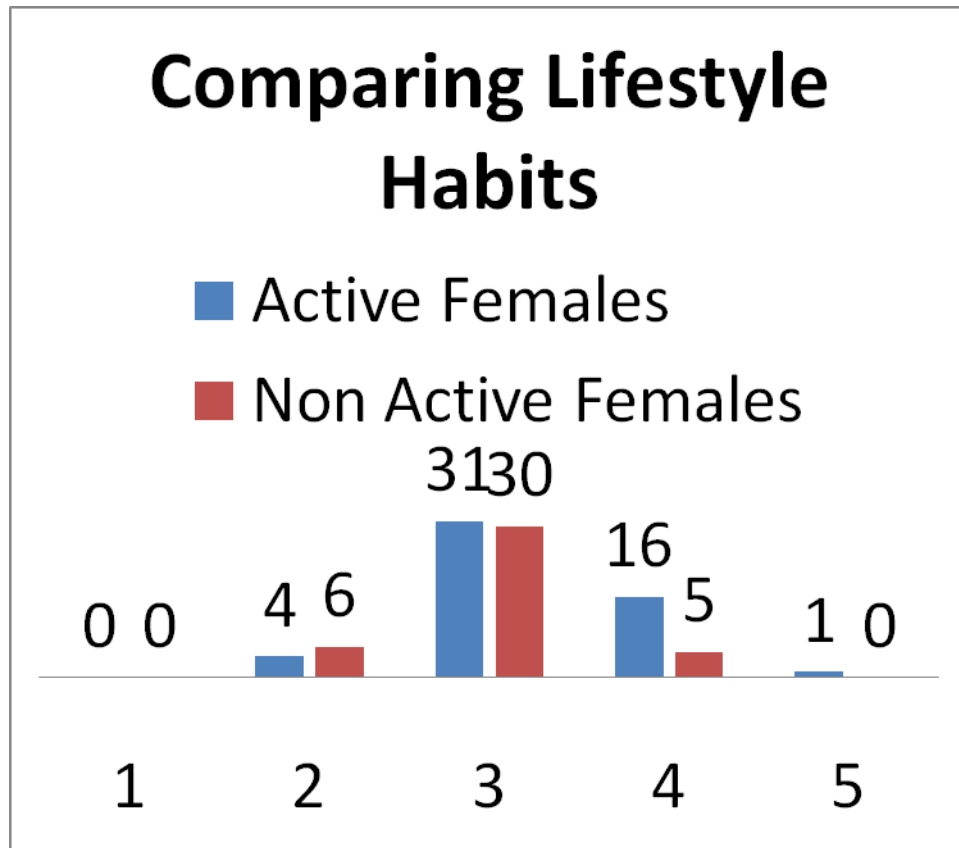
In order to collect our data, we designed a questionnaire to be distributed to UWRF females. We handed out the questionnaire around campus and asked females if they would be interested in participating in our study. All they would need to do to participate is read the questions and choose the most appropriate response. At the top of the questionnaire we stated exactly what we were researching, that the results would be anonymous, the questionnaire was completely voluntary, and instructions of how to complete the questionnaire if willing. The questionnaire determined whether or not the participants were physically active. We also found out what other healthy lifestyle habits the participants had by how they answered each question in the handout. All of the participants were female UWRF college students. They were also all at a college skill level. To fill out the questionnaire, the participants used either a pen or pencil. The questionnaire, pens/pencils, and the EXCEL computer program were the tools and instruments we used to collect and analyze our data.

How disciplined are you with your eating and lifestyle habits?

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. Participate in physical activity at least three times a week?	5	4	3	2	1
2. Go to bed at about the same time each night?	5	4	3	2	1
3. Get 6 to 8 hours of sleep each night?	5	4	3	2	1
4. Avoid the habit of sleeping in?	5	4	3	2	1
5. Eat breakfast seven days a week?	5	4	3	2	1
6. Eat at least three meals a day at approximately the same time?	5	4	3	2	1
7. Consume a nutritious snack at mid-morning and mid-afternoon?	5	4	3	2	1
8. Eat three to five pieces of fruit a day?	5	4	3	2	1
9. Eat at least 2-3 vegetables a day?	5	4	3	2	1
10. Try to incorporate food from all five food groups with an emphasis on fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in to each meal?	5	4	3	2	1
11. Drink at least 8 (8 ounce) glasses of water a day?	5	4	3	2	1
12. Eat fast food more than three times a week?	5	4	3	2	1

When analyzing the data we grouped all the physically active participants into one group and the non-physically active participants into another group. Once we had the two groups, we compared them using a bar graph as to which group had healthier lifestyle habits. We did this by averaging out the results of each individual, which gave them each a number that was connected to how healthy their lifestyle habits were; five being the healthiest and one being the least healthy. Then we grouped all the fives together, fours, threes, and so forth for each group, physically active and non-physically active. The final bar graph shows how the physically active group compares to the non-physically active group in regards to healthy lifestyle habits.

Results



The results of our study indicated that active females on the UWRF campus practice healthier lifestyle habits than females that are less physically active. The graph shows that over all, the physically active female students responded with higher answers, indicating that they practice healthy lifestyle habits. Some of the questions they were asked to respond to requested information about sleeping habits, eating habits, such as consuming adequate numbers of fruits and vegetables, eating meals that incorporate foods from all the food groups, and a question about the consumption of fast food. We decided that these questions defined whether a person practices a healthy lifestyle or not.

It was interesting to see how the nonnative females had lower scores, but it is these people who need to practice these habits to become more healthy and active. In the beginning, we predicted that the active females would score higher on the lifestyle choices they make. Our prediction was correct. The active females did indeed practice healthy lifestyle habits.

Discussion

The results we found are important for not only the specific population we studied, female UWRf students, but also for the general population. Knowing that individuals who are physically active are more likely to have and practice other healthy habits may encourage the general population to become more physically active. Also, this study may help make people aware that if they are not physically active individuals, they need to pay particular close attention to other lifestyle choices they are making. By reading and seeing the results from this study, hopefully it may help and encourage non-physically active individuals to make healthier lifestyle choices, even if they continue to lead sedentary lifestyles. Of course ideally, physical activity and healthy lifestyle habits together is the goal, but if one can be improved upon more than the other, that is still better than living a sedentary, unhealthy life. In any given population improvements can be made in the areas of physical activity and healthy lifestyle habits. What those improvements are may vary depending on the given population. For example, in an elderly population, physical activities are often very limited due to loss of strength, balance and flexibility. What the elderly population can focus on to improve is their lifestyle habits and choices. Such as eating a balanced diet, getting enough sleep, staying hydrated and abstaining from smoking and other harmful habits.

There are some limitations when generalizing this topic to the rest of the population. College students may be involved in team or individual sports which would increase their physical activity more than females in the general population may be exercising. Also, living on campus, as many college females do here at UWRF, may make it harder to actually choose their own diet. Eating what is offered is sometimes the only choice, whereas in the general population individuals make more of their own decisions as to what their diet is made up of. Many college students, male and female, everywhere across the country are lacking sleep, more so than some other populations, such as kids or elderly. None of the article reviews we looked at were exactly like our study, so it is hard to compare our results with theirs. But the overall effect and meaning of the studies all accomplish the same things. The article reviews and our research study all encourage awareness of the importance of living a healthy, balanced, active lifestyle. Our study in particular focuses in on physical activity and how that factors into a healthy lifestyle.

Related Articles

There have been studies done similar to ours on college campuses in this country. Two of these studies we took a look at and compared them to ours held here on campus. The first article was a study on normal weight, overweight, and obese college females and they took measurements over time of their BMI, weight, and body composition and compared them over their career in college (Aeby 2006). Our study is similar in that we looked at college females and compared their habits, but we divided our groups by level of activity and not weight. The second article took group of male and female college students and surveyed them over their college careers and looked at the changes in weight

and behaviors over time (R. Deusinger 2008). In both of these articles they found that majority of college students aren't setting good nutritional habits and healthy behaviors. The articles expressed that if college students don't start now and make those good choices, they are going to be facing long term consequences. It is important to look at these other studies to show that this is not an area that is studied at lengths, and so there should be more research done to express the need for setting healthy lifestyle choices.

Conclusion

This was a very interesting study. When given the survey, some people on the spot, started to rethink their lifestyle habits. We hoped that after taking this survey, the participants might start to be more conscious about some of the decisions they make every day that could affect their health. We were able to get the results that we had hoped for, which was to see that more college females practice healthy lifestyle habits and stay physically active. However we did see people that did not practice these habits, but we hope that they may change their habits to be able to live a healthy life.

Sources

- Aeby , Dallas; Malinauskas, Raedeke; & Smith. (2006) Dieting practices, weight perceptions, and body composition: A comparison of normal weight, overweight, and obese college females. Nutrition Journal, Volume 5, Pages 11-8, 8p.

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