



CAMPUS CONDITION

Starvation, studying and sexual trysts, oh my! Did you know that 75 per cent of Irish students admit that their lifestyles take a drastic nosedive when they move out and start college? Christine Allen explores how students can stay healthy and safe during the college year

FROM Freshers' Week to finals, the bodies of students can become a dustbin for bad food, too much booze, too little sleep and more sexual encounters than is considered possible.

And what about those who study hard and travel up and down to their family home each weekend? It's not easy being a student, even if they make it look simple.

Half of third level students have gained weight or expect to gain weight when they start college while 60 per cent of students choose foods by the cost rather than nutritional value.

According to Dr Muireann Cullen, Dietician and Manager of the Nutrition and Health Foundation, Ireland has one of the highest rates of obesity in Europe.

"With over 60 per cent of the adult Irish population overweight or obese, we need to target each demographic to encourage not only an understanding of good nutrition but actually adopting good dietary habits. Students are typically cash poor," she continues.

"However, it is alarming to see such a strong focus on food cost over nutrition, such low levels of physical activity and such high levels of actual or expected weight gain amongst this segment of the population."

The 'Student Eating Habits 2011'

study,
conducted
by

Empathy Research on behalf of the Nutrition and Health Foundation in August spoke to 500 participants.

According to a recent AIB student income survey, most students only have a disposable income of €55, which is frightening when you consider that around 41 per cent of those surveyed spend between €21 and €40 on socialising. Twenty-six per cent spend between €21 and €30 on food shopping.

So, how many students meet dietary requirements?

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And what about exercise? How do Irish scholars get on with physical activity?

Only two in ten students get the recommended half hour of physical activity five times a week, while

29 per cent of students play sports or exercise three to four times each week.

However, only 20 per cent of students only exercise or play sport every fortnight or more.

Some would argue that dancing at the nightclub, followed with some bumping and grinding at home, might be considered exercise. While your sexual trysts are your own business, if you're not having safe sex, they might not be as good for your health as you think.

According to Deirdre Seery of the Cork Sexual Health Centre, many students, especially first years, tend to party a bit harder and sleep with numerous people.

"The stress of the Leaving Certificate is behind them and they have just left home and moved into a completely new and free life. Many add too much drinking to a night out and find themselves experimenting with sexual partners and having wild parties," she says.

She says students need to be aware that pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) can occur without the use of condoms and that most STIs have no symptoms.

"Even if female students are on the pill, they should always use condoms."

She also says that some students are shocked to learn that STIs can be contracted and pregnancy can occur on the

very first sexual encounter.

The Cork Sexual Health Centre on 16 Peter Street offers free advice on relationships and sex, as well as free condoms, free pregnancy testing, free sexual health advice and free crisis pregnancy counselling.

For more advice, contact the Cork Sexual Health Centre on 021-4275837 or email info@sexual-healthcentre.com.

