

Tara Gallagher

Ms. Valenza

Creative Writing Period 11

29 February 2016

Many college students are faced with the challenge of staying physically fit during the transformation from adolescence to adulthood. A major problem faced by the college students of this generation is damage to the physical body and brain. According to "Alumni Day" college life can be difficult to balance with physical activity and a nutritious diet. Establishing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle is difficult to do throughout college when students are faced by many different pressures. When college students create healthy habits for themselves, they are able to overcome these pressures, prevent physical damage, and obtain many benefits. Despite how hard it may be to persevere, staying physically active and sustaining a healthy diet during college is advantageous in a student's current and future life.

Many incoming college freshmen are warned about the Freshmen Fifteen, a widespread phenomenon. A problem many college students face is gaining excess weight during the first year of college. According to Mary Beth Cox, this problem has caused many doctors to warn college students about the 'Freshmen Fifteen' during their pre-college physicals (6). It's important for college students to be warned because they will become more aware and educated. A major advisory to college students' health is the Freshmen Fifteen so it's necessary for college students to learn ways to prevent unhealthy activities.

Sometimes it is the college life that gets in the way of maintaining healthy activities. Moving to a new area, meeting new friends, and transitioning are all components of starting college. Cox contends that college students stress about fitting in, finding themselves, and becoming comfortable at their school (6). They have to maintain grades, meet new people, and manage an independent lifestyle (Cox 6). College freshmen have a great deal to worry about, and keeping a healthy lifestyle typically falls to the bottom of that list. It can be hard for students to maintain healthy behaviors because college life is filled with “final exam cramfests, late-night pizza deliveries, game-day tailgates, and fraternity keggers” which have detrimental effects on the physical and mental health of students (Dehorit et al. 76). During finals week, college students do not get the proper amount of sleep to keep their body healthy (Dehorit et al. 76). Many college students also drink a large amount of alcohol which not only harms their body, but also causes them to gain excess weight (Dehorit et al. 76). Another part of college that adds to the unhealthy lifestyle is the diet of students. There are many unhealthy food options available at dining halls that attract stressed out college freshmen (Cox 6). According to Cox, “noisy community-dining halls encourage overfeeding” so college students eat more at the buffet-style meals and fast food chains (6). Poor eating habits are easy to develop when college students are constantly faced with pizza, burgers, and desserts. Many of these schools have healthy sections to eat at, but when there are many unhealthy food choices, the students who are not concerned about their health will drift towards the unhealthy foods. The stress, easily

accessible unhealthy food, lack of sleep, and partying are some of the evil factors at college that prevent students from having healthy lifestyles.

Cell phones are another danger to a college student's physical fitness. More time spent on the phone means less time spent working out. According to Lepp et al. cell phone usage has a negative relationship with cardiorespiratory fitness (79). The more a person uses his cell phone, the worse his fitness tends to be (Lepp et al. 79). One of the reasons that cell phones can be detrimental to a person's fitness is because cell phone activity takes up the free time people have to exercise. Lepp et al. states that the cell phone gets in the way of the college student participating in physical activity opportunities (79). Instead of hiking or taking a jog, college students can stay back in their dorms and play on their phones. As college students increase their sedentary activities, their physical activity decreases as well as their health. Lepp et al. claims that these students who sit more often and exercise less are more prone to health issues (79). This is an issue because as Lepp et al. states, cell phone usage is linked to other sedentary activities such as watching T.V. (79). The excessive use of cell phones can create bad sedentary behaviors for college students and set them at a bigger risk for health issues.

The fitness of college students is a very important topic because many college students do not have healthy behaviors. According to an ACHA survey, only 43.6% of college students were physically active (Woekel et al.). This is a big issue if the majority of college students are physically inactive. Woekel et al. also states that "more than one in five U.S. college students are overweight and nearly 12% are obese" which creates a

concern for the health of these students. These statistics prove that there are many college students who do not exercise which results in their bodies are suffering. For the students who do exercise, there are those who exercise in unhealthy ways. Body image is a large motivator for students to stay physically active. However, Chalk et al. claims this can be a bad motivator because it might lead students to overdoing their exercises, decreasing their dietary intake, and possibly developing eating disorders (102). Another issue with college students is that they do not have a proper dietary intake. According to Woekel et al. the majority of college students have an unhealthy dietary intake, do not take in the recommended amount of fiber, and do not change up their meals from day to day. If college students are lacking the nutrition they need to sustain a healthy lifestyle, they can develop health problems, gain or lose unhealthy weight, or experience other detrimental effects to their health. However, many college students can attribute their unhealthy behaviors to unawareness. According to Judge et al. the majority of college students are unaware that it is necessary to exercise five days a week for at least thirty minutes (A73). This can explain why most college students are physically inactive. Many college students are not maintaining a healthy physical fitness because they are uneducated, pressured by body image, or not eating properly.

There is a theory that college students who are physically active use exercise to stay away from using drugs. However, Dunn and Wang suggest that this theory is incorrect with alcohol because college students who are highly physically active are more likely to consume alcohol than non-physically active college students. This positive relationship is problematic because while these college students are

maintaining physical health, they are ruining their mental health. Chalk believes the reason behind this is that exercise will work off the excess calories from the alcohol (102). Since physically active college students are consuming higher amounts of alcohol, exercising is a way for them to burn the calories from drinking beer, wine, or hard liquor. However, this drug and exercise relationship is interesting because with marijuana and cigarettes, there are negative relationships. Dunn and Wang state that highly physically active college students are less likely to smoke cigarettes and less likely to use marijuana than non-physically active college students. This trend might be explained by the fact that smokers ruin their lungs and their cardiorespiratory fitness which will only make physical activity harder for them. Although exercise may be an excuse for some college students to drink more alcohol, it can also be a reason for college students to stay away from marijuana and cigarettes.

There are many advantages to maintaining physical fitness throughout college. Staying physically active helps students feel more confident about themselves and their bodies. Woekel et al. states that physical activity makes people feel stronger and more able to conquer challenges that face them. Judge et al. agrees with this claim that college students who are more physically active tend to have more self-confidence (A73). Students with more self-confidence tend to have lower BMIs, lower amounts of fast food consumption, and higher flexibility (Judge et al. A73). When a college student is physically active and keeping his body healthy, he will be more confident in himself. Physical activity also encourages college students to live healthier lifestyles. According to Judge et al. fit college students spend less time video gaming and playing on the

Web (A73). College students who perform more aerobic activity are spending their time in a more beneficial and useful way. Exercising can be a source of entertainment which makes video gaming and playing on the Web unnecessary. Another major benefit to staying physically fit in college is an improved academic achievement. Judge et al. explains that as a college student performs more aerobic activity, their GPA is more likely to be higher (A73). A possible reason why college students who exercise tend to have higher GPAs is that these physically active students have more experience with using their time efficiently and are able to manage physical activity and academics. Staying physically active in college promotes a healthier lifestyle with more self-confidence, a healthier body, and superior academic achievement.

Another reason why maintaining physical fitness in college is advantageous is that it helps people develop healthy behaviors for life. The habits that students develop during college are generally kept with them after college. Woekel et al. claims that “84.6% of regular exercisers continued their workouts post-graduation and 81.3% of non-exercisers were no more active, and possibly less so, post-graduation,” which means physical activity habits are generally kept post-graduation. It’s important for students to develop healthy fitness behaviors in college because the habits will most likely stick with the students for the rest of their lives since college is a time to create an independent life.

Since staying physically fit in college is very advantageous, colleges should find ways to encourage their students to become active and healthy. One way to educate college students about health behavior is to offer the Lifetime Fitness for Health course

that provides “factual information and practical strategies for health behavior changes at a transitional time to adulthood” (Woekel et al.). This course teaches students why they should stay active and ways to be fit. Educating college students will make them more aware of what is important to focus on regarding health. This course helped previous students realize what they were doing right and what they needed to work on. Woekel et al. contends that the LFH course also resulted in the enrolled college students improving their views on diets and making better food choices. The LFH course is a way for colleges to help their students become more conscious of their health behaviors, reevaluate their diet and exercise habits, and make healthier decisions in life.

It’s important for students to stay physically fit throughout college because it will help them maintain a healthy lifestyle and prepare for healthier behaviors throughout life. By exercising and eating healthy during college, students develop habits that they keep with them for the rest of their lives. College is a time for students to create a physical fitness regiment independently with a balance of work and social life. A question that colleges should consider is whether there should be a required fitness course, similar to the Lifetime Fitness Health, to educate and encourage students to create a healthy system for dietary intake and fitness. College fitness is important because there are many components of college that prevent students from being as healthy as they can be. Poor fitness on a college campus can result in the Freshmen Fifteen or health issues among the student body. The college students who are physically active have healthier bodies and minds which will create a healthier society when the college students join the outside world.

Works Cited

- "Alumni Day." Creative Writing Class Period 11. Jericho High School, NY. 5 Jan. 2016. Lecture.
- Chalk, Holly M., et al. "Predictors of Obligatory Exercise among Undergraduates: Differential Implications for Counseling College Men and Women." *Journal of College Counseling* 16.2 (2013): 102. *Psychology eCollection*. Web. 24 Jan. 2016.
- Cox, Mary Beth. "Wrestling with Calories." *Odyssey* Feb. 2011: 6. *General OneFile*. Web. 20 Jan. 2016.
- Dehorit, Sam, et al. "The 25 Fittest Colleges in America: Which Universities Are Head of the Class in Terms of Fitness? Find out Whether Your School Made the Grade." *Men's Fitness* Oct. 2011: 76. *General OneFile*. Web. 24 Jan. 2016.
- Dunn, Michael S., and Min Qi Wang. "Effects of Physical Activity on Substance Use among College Students." *American Journal of Health Studies* 18.2/3 (2003): 126-32. *ProQuest Research Library*. Web. 31 Jan. 2016.
- Judge, Lawrence W., et al. "Physical Activity Patterns and Academic Performance of College Students." *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* 85.S1 (2014): A73. *ProQuest Research Library*. Web. 27 Jan. 2016.
- Lepp, Andrew, et al. "The Relationship between Cell Phone Use, Physical and Sedentary Activity, and Cardiorespiratory Fitness in a Sample of U.S. College Students." *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* 10 (2013): 79. *ProQuest Research Library*. Web. 26 Jan. 2016.

Woekel, Erica, et al. "Physical Activity, Nutrition, and Self-Perception Changes Related to a University 'Lifetime Fitness for Health' Curriculum." *Physical Educator* 70.4 (2013): 374-94. *Professional Development Collection*. Web. 21 Jan. 2016.