

# Fries, pies and flabby thighs

## Fighting the "freshman fifteen"

By Rebecca Wicks

**H**ave you heard about the "freshman fifteen?" Chances are, you haven't. Well, you've been busy preparing for the school year, haven't you? The start of something new and exciting and anyway, it's a very American term. It's a term given to describe the 15-pound gain (7 kg) in weight that many students experience when they start college.

But don't panic – not yet anyway. According to researchers at Washington University in St. Louis, and their report in the oh-so-wise *Journal of American College Health*, about 70 percent of students do put on a significant amount of weight between the start of college and the end of sophomore year. However, they tend to gain an average of three to ten pounds (1.5-4.5 kg).

Now, if you don't think it could happen to you, think again. You might not be American or live on a diet of junk food, but when you're finally free to do what you want, eat when you please, abandon all exercise in favor of a lazy afternoon in front of the TV – we mean, working on your studies – it's



easy not to notice the pounds piling on. They sneak up on you as you busy yourself with other things, expanding your thighs and baking that muffin-top without your permission. How rude!

Let's not forget, of course, that college is a time of immense change. It can be stressful, fitting into new social groups, battling stereotypes and social stigmas, squeezing into whatever clothes are deemed the latest fashion. And we all eat to make ourselves happy, too, whenever something else doesn't work out quite right.

### Shared experiences

Check out the Web site [www.freshman15.com](http://www.freshman15.com) when you've got a minute. It's littered with stories from exasperated students (mostly in the U.S.) who've experienced weight gain and sought an understanding cyber-shoulder to cry on. Some of their problems might sound familiar.

Jen, a student at Clark College writes: "I was unaware of the first 30 pounds (14 kgs) because my body didn't feel much different. My jeans fit, but more snugly compared to when they used to fit loosely on me. I thought I was just bloated.

"I didn't pay much attention to my weight until I gained another 20 pounds (9 kg). *That* was when I started to really *feel* the difference. My favorite pair of black jeans, which used to fall off if I didn't wear a belt, would not even go past my thunder thighs. I hopped on the scale in spring. The scale read 173 (78.5 kg). I was shocked.

"I tried watching what I ate and exercised after that, but I couldn't help overeating because I became so used to eating

huge portions, and the excessive weight made it very difficult for me to exercise."

JR, a student at Waterloo University, experienced just the opposite. She lost a lot when she arrived at college, due to walking all over the campus. It didn't last long, however.

"My initial weight loss prompted my diet of fried chicken and cola all year and I gained 22 pounds (10 kgs), ballooning my stomach and adding two inches to my waistline! I had to buy new clothes this summer to accommodate my 38-inch girth."

If the so-called "freshman fifteen" is so well-known in the USA, then the "Dubai Stone" is a term fondly given to expats here, who've padded out upon arrival, thanks to little exercise and a lot of lunching/brunching.

Well, it's tough to accept that our young, lithe bodies might cave in to temptation at any point, refusing to stay firm in the face of another late-night shawarma or cheese manakish. With youth comes blissful oblivion and the need to experiment, whatever the cost. In fact, one study found that almost 70 percent of students get fewer than the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Taken a bite off an apple lately?

### Battling the bulge

Type "freshman 15" into site [expertvillage.com](http://expertvillage.com) and up springs a handy, free video series, by experts Kristen Bryda and Jenny Cooper from Vanderbilt University's Medical Center. They're dishing out loads of advice and tips on how to avoid piling on the weight and speak directly to young adults living on their own for the first time. Covered in the series are causes of early col-

lege weight gain, how to exercise properly and how to eat healthily on campus. Before long, you'll be storing nuts and raisins in your room like a little squirrel, and saying boo-hiss to the chocolate (probably). Either way, check it out. These ladies really know their stuff.

Of course, some weight gain is normal throughout adolescence. Bodies change, metabolism alters and all of a sudden, you just can't get away with a Snickers for breakfast, a Big Mac for lunch and a number 55 sweet 'n' sour chicken for dinner. And even if you're lucky enough to be skin-

well be because of your diet. But (call up your conscience here, folks) your eating habits and consequential illnesses could eventually affect others, as well as yourself. In American states using attendance rates to determine funding, students skipping school because of health issues is a serious matter. Combined non-attendance for just one day a month can cost a large district like New York a massive 28 million dollars a year. And you thought that cheese-and-chicken pizza treat was expensive?

When all is said and done, eating is fun. We all love it. We all overdo it from time to

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ny, eating like this carries no end of health risks. You might think you're pulling it off, but you're setting yourself on a scary path towards all manner of future illnesses like heart disease and Type II diabetes. You're even putting yourself at risk of developing certain cancers. Yikes!

Has your energy started to lag? Has your memory begun to suffer? This could

time, but when you need your brain and body to look and think beautifully, is it really worth it?

The next time you reach for the phone to dial a junk food overload in your state of student bliss, perhaps you'll give a thought to the lifetime it'll spend on your hips, as opposed to that one delicious moment on your lips. ☺