ABSTRACT

Objective: Determine the strategies and barriers to maintaining weight among freshman and sophomore students living in university dorms.

Design: Descriptive, survey research using a convenience sample.

Participants: A total of 103 freshman and sophomore college students, who were at least 18 years old, currently lived in dormitories, and able to read and write in English, completed the surveys.

Methods: Participants were recruited using 3 strategies: 1) during or after student organization meetings; 2) at the end of select lower division undergraduate classes; or 3) using a table set up outside the Jester dormitory, West Mall, or Gregory Gym. Three surveys were administered: background information survey, strategies for weight management questionnaires, and barriers to successful weight management questionnaire. Surveys with a cover letter were distributed to interested participants. Upon the return of the three surveys, the participants received a thank you gift of an individual pre-packaged snack (e.g., fruit snacks, baked chips, granola bars).

Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics were performed using SPSS to calculate frequencies, means, and standard deviations for each variable as appropriate.

Results: The top 5 strategies for both genders to manage weight were: avoid sugar-filled drinks; use mustard or ketchup rather than mayonnaise; stop eating when full; have a fruit along with the meal; choose foods made with whole grains (e.g., whole-wheat bread, corn tortilla, brown rice). The top 5 barriers to weight management for both genders were: healthy menu items are more expensive; convenience of fast food; availability of foods with high fat/kcal content; need to choose food that is cheapest, even if high in fat & calories; important to get “your money’s worth” when eating at dining venues.

Conclusion: Major themes that emerged in describing factors and barriers to weight management included: cost of food is a major barrier to weight management in students living in dorms; women living in dorms were more likely to use strategies to manage weight compared to men; and women living in dorms had higher barriers to managing weight compared to men.