

Starting university may be hazardous to your health: study

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Moving away from home and adapting to a new social environment are just two of the many challenges that new students face as they enter university. An innovative new study conducted at the University of Alberta has found that these challenges can actually have a negative effect on a student's health.

The researchers found that female students who lived away from home were three times more likely to report symptoms of binge eating compared to those students living with parents during their first year of university studies.

Also, students who felt dissatisfied with their bodies were three times as likely to report symptoms of binge eating when entering their first year of studies.

"Few studies have explored the links between the challenges associated with the transition of entering university and eating problems," says Erin Barker, who conducted the research while completing her PhD at the University of Alberta and current professor at Wisconsin's Beloit College.

One-hundred-and-one (101) full-time female first-year students at a large North American university completed a web-based daily checklist of health behaviors (i.e. sleeping, eating, exercise, alcohol use) for 14 consecutive days over one of four two-week periods in the first three months of fall term. Variables studied included binge eating symptoms,

body dissatisfaction, living away from home and number of class hours per week.

"Moving away from home and poor social adjustment may reflect decreases in social support and increases in interpersonal stress that for some young women contribute to eating problems," says Barker. "In the future, research should study whether adjustment to the transition to university contributes to binge eating in young men as well."

Source: University of Alberta

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