

Watching too much TV is causing some university students to pack on the pounds

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Television commercials are a common method for advertising food products. According to a team of University of Alberta researchers, these food advertisements have a powerful influence on its viewers, especially university students.

"The transition from adolescence to adulthood has been shown to be a time for taking on many negative health behaviors including increases in smoking and alcohol use and decreases in physical activity and fruit and vegetable consumption," said Kim Raine, director of the University of Alberta's Centre for Health Promotion Studies. "In this study, we were investigating whether TV viewership and recognition of snack advertisements were associated with snack food consumption and the odds of being overweight or obese."

What the researchers found was quite alarming.

University students who reported medium or high television viewership snacked more frequently while watching TV and recognized more advertising than students who were considered low TV viewers.

Previous studies have examined food intake and caloric consumption in relation to TV viewing among adults, but few have considered the role of snacking in relation to TV viewing and body weight status among young adults.

University students who watched over four hours or more of TV per day

snacked more frequently while watching TV, recognized more TV advertisements and consumed more energy-dense snacks than students who viewed less than one hour of TV per day. Specifically, male students and medium-to-high television viewers had higher odds of being overweight or obese.

"The link between how much a person snacks while watching TV was directly related to viewing food advertisements, specifically when choosing to eat an energy-dense snack," said John Spence, co-author of the study and U of A professor in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation. "The exposure to the advertising seems to stimulate a desire to eat that particular food product. Also, sitting watching TV provides a prime opportunity to snack."

Source: University of Alberta

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