

Young adults need to make more time for healthy meals

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As adolescents mature into young adults, increasing time constraints due to school or work can begin to impact eating habits in a negative way. In a study published in the January 2009 issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, researchers observed that while young adults enjoy and value time spent eating with others, 35% of males and 42% of females reported lacking time to sit down and eat a meal. They further noted that "eating on the run" was related to higher consumption of unhealthy items like fast foods and lower consumption of many healthful foods.

By surveying 1687 young adults between 18 and 25, who had previously participated in the Project EAT (Eating Among Teens) study while in high school, investigators from the School of Public Health, University of Minnesota assessed both eating behaviors and dietary balance. In particular, the participants were asked whether they enjoyed eating with friends or family in social settings, whether eating regular meals was important and whether they felt they had to eat on the run due to time pressures. Regarding dietary balance, they were asked about their past year intake of fruit, vegetables, dark-green and orange vegetables, whole grains and soft drinks, as well as their consumption of fast food in the past week.

The results suggest that perceived time constraints may be a common barrier to sitting down for meals. Social eating was associated with greater intake of several healthful foods (e.g., vegetables) and with higher intakes of calcium and fiber among males. In contrast, "eating on

the run" was associated with higher intakes of soft drinks, fast food and fat, and with lower intake of several healthful foods among females.

Writing in the article, Nicole I. Larson states, "The findings of this study suggest there is a need to address the influence of perceived time constraints on the eating and meal behaviors of early young adults...Having few shared meals and frequently 'eating on the run' were associated with poorer dietary intake...As most young adults indicated they enjoy and value time that is spent eating with others, it may be beneficial for health promotion strategies targeting young adults to address the management and reduction of individual time barriers to having regular, shared meals."

Paper: The article is "Making Time for Meals: Meal Structure and Associations with Dietary Intake in Young Adults" by Nicole I. Larson, PhD, MPH, RD, Melissa C. Nelson, PhD, RD, Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, PhD, MPH, RD, Mary Story, PhD, RD, and Peter J. Hannan, MStat. It appears in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association, Volume 109, Issue 1 (January 2009) published by Elsevier.

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