

Brief interventions can help college students return to a healthy lifestyle

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The weight gain commonly known as the "Freshman 15" is a negative aspect of the college experience for many college freshmen who are independent for the first time, most making lifestyle decisions about eating and exercise. Researchers say it's no surprise freshmen experience one of the largest weight gains in their lifetimes when they attend college. A new study from the University of Missouri has found that a brief intervention, sometimes as little as 30 minutes, can help put students back on the right track to a healthy lifestyle – a change that can impact the rest of their lives.

"What we found in our study was that getting personalized feedback about health issues is important," said Matt Martens, associate professor of counseling psychology in the College of Education. "It may not matter how long or short that intervention is; what seems to be important is getting the feedback. These simple interventions can be used at a doctor's office prior to an appointment, possibly while the individual is sitting in the [waiting room](#). The idea behind these methods is to open the conversations, identifying the [unhealthy lifestyle](#) decisions and setting goals for the future."

[Brief interventions](#) can be delivered in many forms. In the current study, participants were asked to complete a 10-minute questionnaire. They were then given a feedback sheet based on their responses, which they discussed with a clinician for approximately 25 to 30 minutes. After one month, those who received the intervention reported engaging in significantly more exercise compared to those who did not receive the

intervention.

While it could be difficult to do this during every doctor visit, Martens said that [healthcare providers](#) could alter these suggestions to fit their patients. If providers can begin to include these intervention strategies, they could see their patients making better decisions about their lifestyles, Martens said.

Current federal activity guidelines recommend that individuals participate in 75 minutes of vigorous, physical activity per week or 150 minutes of moderate activity per week. Marten said that, prior to the intervention, the [study participants](#) fell far short of those recommendations.

Another benefit of this intervention is the low cost that is associated with this type of strategy. Potentially not much time, if any, is needed between the patient and the healthcare provider, but it could save a lot of money in prevention costs.

"The whole point of all these studies on exercise, interventions and lifestyle decisions is to keep people from getting sick," Martens said. "In the end, it comes down to individuals making good lifestyle decisions, but sometimes it's important for healthcare providers to bring certain decisions that do not contribute to a [healthy lifestyle](#) to the attention of the patient."

The study was published in the *Journal of Physical Activity & Health*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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