

Students' diet and physical activity improve with parent communications

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College students eat more fruits and vegetables and exercise more on days when they communicate more with their parents, according to researchers at Penn State.

"Only a third of college students consumes a diet that is consistent with national recommendations," said Meg Small, research associate in the Prevention Research Center for the Promotion of Human Development. "In addition, college students' [physical activity levels](#) decline from the first semester to their seventh semester. Our research suggests that parents may play an important role in influencing their adolescents to establish [behavioral patterns](#) that improve their long-term health and chronic-disease risk."

In order to examine the protective effects of parent-college student communication on student eating and physical activity behaviors, the researchers recruited 746 first-year students at a large university in the U. S. to complete a [baseline survey](#) plus 14 daily surveys. The surveys included questions about how much time students spent talking to, e-mailing or text messaging their parents. In addition, the surveys included questions about how often and for how long students worked out or played sports and how many times they ate fruits or vegetables.

The team found that on days when students communicated with their parents for 30 minutes or more, they were 14 percent more likely to consume [fruits and vegetables](#) and 50 percent more likely to engage in 30 minutes or more of physical activity. The results appear in the current

issue of the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

According to Small, the researchers did not document the content of the conversations between students and their parents; therefore, they do not know why the conversations had such positive effects on students' behaviors.

"It is likely that communication with parents has both direct and indirect effects on college students' eating and physical activity behaviors," said Small. "Parents may directly remind students to eat a variety of healthy foods and engage in physical activity. Indirectly, communication with parents may remind students someone cares about their health and well being, and that may motivate them to take better care of themselves."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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