

Cheaper, easier access to fruits and veggies key to college students eating better

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A benefit-oriented approach to nutrition increases college students' willingness to consume fruits and vegetables, yet the availability and cost of healthy food on campus are critical to changing their eating habits, according to research published in *The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*.

Researchers surveyed 175 [college students](#), assessing their willingness to change their diet to include more fruits and vegetables. Participants were asked to weigh pros like improved energy, meal variety and weight control against perceived disadvantages like being hungry, having less energy and not enjoying meals.

Once convinced that more fruits and vegetables would benefit them, students noted that other changes were needed of fruits to help them eat better. These included adding vending machines that sell produce, increasing the variety of fruits offered and improving the taste and variety of cafeteria meal choices. Perhaps most important, students said produce needs to be more affordable.

"Between 90 and 95 percent of adults in the U.S. do not consume the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables," says Manoj Sharma, MBBS, Ph.D., a professor of behavioral health at Jackson State University and lead researcher on this study. "This basic nutritional deficiency is tied to myriad health problems, so it is important to address it early."

According to the survey, sustaining a diet with the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables requires an emotional shift, in which students decide to eat healthy even when they are stressed or feeling low. Respondents also said keeping a diary or utilizing an app that helped track [eating habits](#) would help monitor their consumption and rectify their diet if they face difficulties. Finally, enlisting the support of family and friends appeared crucial to sustainment.

"Once we can entice students to add more fruits and vegetables into their diets and create conditions that make it possible, we have to then focus making those changes permanent," says Vinayak K. Nahar, MD, Ph.D., an assistant professor at Lincoln Memorial University and co-author on this study.

More information: Manoj Sharma et al, Using a Multitheory Model to Predict Initiation and Sustenance of Fruit and Vegetable Consumption Among College Students, *The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association* (2018). [DOI: 10.7556/jaoa.2018.119](https://doi.org/10.7556/jaoa.2018.119)

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