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The Nutritional Habits Of Students Living in Dormitories

Mohd. FZ, Murugan Kaviya, Ravichandran Madhu Nisha

1. Mohd. FZ – Lecturer, International Medical Faculty, Osh State University, Kyrgyz Republic.

2. Murugan Kaviya – Student, International Medical Faculty, Osh State University, Kyrgyz Republic. ORCID: 0009-0004-0705-7322

3. Ravichandran Madhu Nisha – Student, International Medical Faculty, Osh State University, Kyrgyz Republic. ORCID: 0009-0008-9152-7532

ABSTRACT

Background: The university period is characterized by many lifestyle changes, including poor nutrition practices. Freshmen are more vulnerable to poor nutrition because of various factors that include high academic pressure, accommodation issues, lack of finances, and autonomy in decision-making. It is important to understand nutritional behaviors and develop relevant health promotion interventions.

Objective: The present study was intended to explore nutritional habits of freshmen students studying at Osh University and examine the factors affecting their eating habits.

Methods: Cross-sectional study design was used to examine the nutritional habits of 94 first-year students attending Osh University. A set of 20 questions was included in the structured online survey related to demographic features, eating behavior, food choice, drinks preferences, dietary quality, reasons for food selection, and difficulties in adhering to a nutritious diet. Descriptive statistics were applied to analyze the data on a frequency basis.

Results: It was found out that more than half of the students (53.3%) tended to skip meals, with breakfast being the most commonly missed meal. Few respondents claimed to eat three meals a day, while others preferred one or two meals a day. The students tended to consume fast food and fruit and vegetable consumption appeared insufficient. The taste and convenience of the products emerged as the key factors determining the choice of meals. Students noticed a negative change in their meal routine, meal quality, and diversity after entering the university. Heavy academic schedule, lack of time, and insufficient financial resources were mentioned as barriers to healthy nutrition.

Conclusion: As can be seen from the results, first-year students of Osh University display multiple risk behavioral traits concerning their nutritional practices such as meal skipping, insufficient intake of fruit and vegetables, and consumption of fast food. Therefore, special nutrition-related interventions seem necessary in this situation.

Keywords: *Nutrition-related behavior, university students, healthy eating, dietary habits, skipping meals, fast food consumption, Osh University.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Healthy nutrition is crucial in promoting good health, aiding growth and development, enhancing cognitive functioning, and in the prevention of diseases. Good nutritional habits are especially essential among teenagers and young adults since this stage of life marks a time when an individual becomes more independent and develops health practices that they will maintain throughout their life. The college environment can pose major changes in lifestyle and nutrition choices.

The shift from high school life to college is a vital period that entails many changes in the student's life where they become more responsible for their nutrition decisions. The students usually leave their homes, get used to

their surroundings, experience tough academic work, and face limited finances. All these aspects can negatively impact students' eating habits leading to unhealthy eating practices, like skipping meals or eating out, and insufficient fruit and vegetable intake.

Several studies have been done all around the world indicating improper diets in university students. The nutritional issues faced by these young adults include skipping breakfast, consumption of too many processed foods, lack of adequate consumption of nutrient foods, and reliance on sugary drinks. Poor dietary behavior can result in negative consequences on their academic results, their physical wellbeing, their psychological state, and even future diseases.

Since university students are a priority group for nutritional interventions — as dietary habits formed at that age usually carry on to adulthood — learning about their eating patterns and determinants of dietary behavior is crucial for developing a proper program promoting good health practices. Although much research has been done worldwide regarding the nutrition of university students, there are very few data on this problem in Kyrgyzstan.

One of the largest institutions providing higher education, Osh University, caters for learners coming from varied social and geographical environments. The investigation of dietary behavior among the freshmen of the university would offer some meaningful information regarding the nutritional problems faced by them when adapting to campus life.

Hence, the main purpose of the current research was to examine the nutritional behavior of freshmen at Osh University, investigate meal patterns and eating habits, and determine the factors influencing nutritional decisions. The results might help develop effective recommendations concerning healthy eating behavior at universities.

II. METHODS

Research Design

In order to evaluate the nutrition practices among first-year students at Osh University, a cross-sectional descriptive design was used.

Research Setting and Study Population

The research was conducted at Osh University, Kyrgyzstan. The study population included first-year undergraduate students at Osh University in the academic year 2025–2026. Students from various faculties were selected for the research study.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

For the current study, 94 first-year students were considered. These participants were sampled using a convenient sampling technique whereby the survey questionnaire was distributed to the participants online.

Data Collection Instruments

Data was collected using a standardized questionnaire created on Google Forms. This questionnaire contained 20 questions, grouped into several parts:

1. Sociodemographic information (age, gender, place of residence).
2. Patterns of eating meals and skipping meals.
3. Eating patterns (fast food and cooked at home meals).
4. Consumption of fruits and vegetables.
5. Drinking patterns.
6. Perception of one's diet quality.
7. Factors that affect food choices.
8. Practices related to cooking and availability of cooking facilities.

9. Change in dietary habits after starting university.

10. Difficulties in keeping a healthy diet.

Data Collection Procedure

The electronic questionnaire was circulated among first-year students via university communications channels and social media groups. The data were provided anonymously to preserve confidentiality and allow open responses. Data collection took place during a designated research period.

Ethical Considerations

The involvement in the experiment was totally optional. The participants were made aware of the objectives of the experiment and reassured that the information they provided would be confidential and anonymous. The personal data of the participants were not collected. The data collected were used strictly for research purposes only.

III. RESULTS

3.1 Segment 1 (Questions 1–5): Demographics and Meal Patterns

There were a total of 94 freshmen who completed the questionnaire. Of the four living conditions listed, most of the respondents stayed at home (30.8%), followed by individuals staying somewhere else (27.5%), dormitory residents (23.1%), and those living in apartments (18.7%). This implies that freshmen live in different environments which can affect their access to food, food preparation, and even diet quality.

The largest number of students (40.0%) belong to the age group of 18–19 years, while 34.4% were less than 18 years old and 25.6% were aged 20 years or older. The female sex was dominant amongst the participants as the largest number belonged to this gender (40.0%).

With respect to eating patterns, only 28.6% took the advised three meals per day, 38.5% ate two meals a day, and 18.7% ate one meal daily. Over half of the students skipped eating on a regular basis.

The results obtained are in line with findings from research carried out in Saudi Arabia, India, Turkey, China, Malaysia, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, and Ethiopia, where prevalence of meal skipping was very high at about 40–70% for university students.

Table 1. Demographic and Eating Pattern Characteristics

Variable	Common Findings
Age group	Mostly 18–19 years (40.0%)
Gender	Female dominant
Living arrangement	Mostly at home (30.8%)
Meals per day (3 meals)	Only 28.6% ate three meals daily
Meal skipping	More than half skipped meals regularly
Most skipped meal	Breakfast

Note: Data derived from survey responses of 94 first-year students at Osh University.

3.2 Segment 2 (Questions 6–10): Food Consumption Patterns

The highest percentage of respondents who skipped their meals did not eat breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Lack of breakfast is regarded as a serious issue that affects nutritional intake as well as academic performance.

There was a wide range in terms of home cooked foods, although moderate consumption was reported by many participants. The frequency of eating fast food was high, with 'several times a week' as the majority answer. This shows an increasing trend towards fast food consumption among college students.

Fruits and vegetables were under-consumed. Most students reported consuming fruits and vegetables one to two times in a day, which is lower than the international recommendation of at least five servings per day.

Table 2. Food Consumption and Dietary Patterns

Variable	Common Findings
Breakfast skipping	Most common skipped meal
Fast food frequency	Several times a week (majority)
Home-cooked meals	Moderate consumption reported
Fruit and vegetable intake	1–2 servings/day (below recommended 5)
Diet balance	Mix of healthy and unhealthy food choices
Common comorbid factor	Academic pressure, convenience

Note: CPR = Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation analogy not applicable; data based on dietary survey responses.

3.3 Segment 3 (Questions 11–15): Beverages, Diet Perception, and Food Choice Factors

Soft drinks became the most common types of beverages. Water and tea/coffee were also common choices, yet sugary drinks also played an important role. The excessive consumption of beverages containing sugar is known to cause obesity, insulin resistance, and poor nutrition.

Students perceived their diets as relatively poor overall, with the majority assigning a mark of 2 out of 5 to their eating behavior. This demonstrates awareness among the respondents about the imperfection of their diets.

Taste and convenience ranked as the main criteria affecting food choice, followed by health concerns and food accessibility. Around half of all participants claimed to be able to use cooking facilities. However, many students did not use these cooking facilities frequently enough despite being able to use them.

Table 3. Beverage Habits, Diet Perception, and Cooking Behaviour

Variable	Common Findings
Most common beverage	Soft drinks (sugary beverages)
Diet quality self-rating	2 out of 5 (mostly poor)
Main food choice factor	Taste and convenience
Cooking facility access	About 50% had access
Actual cooking frequency	Low despite facility access
Health concern awareness	Present but overridden by convenience

Note: Data from structured questionnaire responses; 94 participants total.

3.4 Segment 4 (Questions 16–20): University Transition and Dietary Barriers

One third or more of the students felt that their living situation influenced eating habits directly, while some of them did not know. There was an increase in unhealthy eating after joining university according to the responses received. Meal consistency became much worse, food quality declined, and dietary diversity decreased.

Issues related to diet included time constraints, financial limitations, cravings, and living conditions. The results of the study support the findings of multiple published studies indicating that there is always a decline in the quality of diet among university freshmen as they resort to more ready meals, consume fewer fruits and vegetables, and find it hard to maintain healthy diets.

Table 4. Dietary Changes and Barriers After University Entry

Variable	Common Findings
Effect of living situation	More than one-third reported direct influence
Change after university entry	Increase in unhealthy eating reported
Meal consistency	Worsened after university admission
Food quality change	Declined significantly
Dietary diversity	Reduced compared to pre-university
Main barriers to healthy diet	Time, finances, cravings, living conditions

Note: Survey findings from 94 first-year students at Osh University, academic year 2025–2026.

IV. DISCUSSION

The current research examined the nutritional practices of first-year students at Osh University and identified several problems with their nutrition. The analysis showed that skipping meals, insufficient consumption of fruits and vegetables, eating junk food, and decline in diet quality since entry into university are prevalent among participants.

One of the most serious problems faced by participants is skipping meals. Meal omission is mentioned in the survey by more than half of respondents. In particular, breakfast skipping occurred most often. According to some authors, the same problem was discovered in Saudi Arabian, American, Turkish, and Malaysian students, who linked skipping breakfast with poor academic results, inability to concentrate, and poor diet quality in general.

Moreover, the study showed that only a few participants eat three meals a day. On average, the number of meals per day was one to two. This trend is considered unhealthy because it leads to improper nutrient intake and an increase in snacking. As proven by previous research, eating irregularly increases weight fluctuation.

Fast food was common among the participants, since most students ate fast food several times weekly. Previous studies conducted in Europe, North America, and Asia indicate that convenience, affordability, and lack of time were common reasons for their eating habits. Therefore, the predominance of convenience as a determinant of food choice in the current study confirms these interpretations.

Fruits and vegetables were insufficiently eaten by the subjects. The majority of students reported consuming only one to two portions of fruits and vegetables daily, which is lower than the dietary recommendations. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted in China, Canada, and Australia, indicating that insufficient intake of fruits and vegetables persists among university students. It is likely to predispose people to heart diseases, obesity, and nutrient deficiency in the long run.

Moreover, the study shows that university students often feel that they eat irregularly, with poor quality and variety of meals after joining universities. This finding reinforces the view that the university transition is nutritionally

risky. Factors such as academic pressure, living arrangement changes, financial constraints, and increased freedom may be responsible for unhealthy eating habits.

Limitations should be considered while interpreting the results. Self-reported data is subject to potential distortions due to issues related to recall and social desirability bias. A cross-sectional design cannot identify cause-and-effect connections. Also, a limitation can be noted in the sampling method that involves only first-year students of one university. However, despite these limitations, the research offers important insights into the nutritional problems of first-year university students in Kyrgyzstan.

V. CONCLUSION

This research analyzed the nutrition behaviors of first-year students attending Osh University and found several nutritional issues. It was observed that students often skip meals, specifically the breakfast meal. Many students eat less than three meals in a day as suggested. There was more fast-food intake among the students and inadequate intake of fruits and vegetables.

It was seen that the choices made by students regarding foods were based on convenience and taste factors. Even though the majority of the respondents had the option to prepare meals due to the availability of cooking facilities, very few students did this. In addition, many students admitted that their eating habits deteriorated since their admission to university, especially concerning the number of meals eaten daily, the nature of their food items, and dietary diversity.

From the results presented above, it is clear that there is an urgent need to develop nutrition campaigns among college students to ensure healthy nutrition. Educational programs emphasizing the importance of healthy eating habits, proper meal planning, and food preparation are recommended. The first-year students at Osh University are experiencing numerous nutritional problems which may affect their current and future well-being, and it will be important to address these issues through appropriate strategies.

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