

# Women fret more over weight gain in college

June 20 2013, by Kathleen Doheny, Healthday Reporter

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Guys seem okay with the extra pounds, study finds.

(HealthDay)—It's true that college students tend to pack on extra pounds, but women are more likely to be troubled by that weight gain than men, according to a new study.

"As women gained weight, their eating attitudes worsened and [body dissatisfaction](#) rose," said Laura Girz, a University of Toronto [graduate student](#) and lead author of the study, published online recently in the journal *Appetite*.

The "[freshman 15](#)" may be a [misnomer](#), though. The study of nearly 500 students found undergrads add less than 10 pounds on average.

The researchers followed the incoming freshmen—whose average age was about 18— from just before they entered college through the next

four years. Besides charting weight, they assessed attitudes about eating, depression and [body satisfaction](#), and charted how those attitudes changed as the scale shifted.

Gender differences were considerable, the researchers found.

Most students—303—gained some weight. Another 100 remained weight stable and 75 lost weight.

On average, the men gained about 9 pounds and the women about 7 over the entire study period.

Guys who porked up had the same attitudes about eating and well-being as the men who remained weight stable, Girz said. However, men who lost weight reported negative eating attitudes both at the study start and at the end.

The bottom line: Weight gain is linked with more preoccupation with weight and negative eating attitudes for women, but not men, while weight loss improves the negative eating attitudes only of women. Men who started out heavy and had [negative attitudes](#) about eating, Girz found, did not have better attitudes even if they lost weight.

Weight changes didn't have much effect on depression, she added.

Girz speculated that men who were underweight to begin with might have welcomed the additional pounds.

"The first year is a really stressful time and that can have an effect on eating behavior," Girz said. However, as students settle in, the weight control may become easier.

Students have told her that widespread availability of food on campus,

large portions and school stress can undermine attempts to eat sensibly, Girz said. Stress can make some people stop eating, she noted, and prompt others to overeat.

Another expert indicated the findings were to be expected.

The [gender differences](#) "are probably not too surprising when you think about it," said Heidi Wengreen, associate professor of nutrition, dietetics and nutritional sciences at Utah State University in Logan, Utah, who was not involved with the study.

Many college-age men may want to put on muscle mass, so the weight gain does not concern them, she noted.

Also, the transition to college is a major life change, Wengreen said. In her own research, she has found weight gain more likely for students who said they were exercising less because of school pressures and time constraints.

Girz tells students not to obsess about [weight gain](#). "We know the more you obsess, it's usually counterproductive," she said. Instead, she advises college students to listen to their body and recognize signals of fullness and hunger. Instead of chronic dieting, she suggests eating a balanced diet.

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics advises [college students](#) to eat breakfast, look for high-fiber foods, choose lean protein such as chicken and fish, and limit intake of alcohol and sugary drinks.

**More information:** To learn more about smart eating at college, visit the [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#).

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