



The intake of fruit and vegetables by third level students in Ireland

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Fruit and vegetables are an essential part of our diet and contain important vitamin and minerals. The dietary guidelines in Ireland suggest that all individuals should consume at least five portions of fruit and vegetables daily⁽¹⁾. Healthy food habits are learned during childhood and will continue through adulthood. However, there are barriers that state why many college students do not consume enough, including cost, availability, and lack of variety⁽²⁾. An online questionnaire was circulated to third level students from three Institutes in the North-West of Ireland, from November 2020 to March 2021. The data collected from the questionnaire included age, gender, stress score, physical activity level, amount of sleep and total number of fruit and vegetables consumed daily. All information collected was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software version 26. A total of 674 students took part in this study (219 males and 455 females). The mean age of participants was 24.9 ± 8.9 years. This study found that there is only a small number of students (21.6%) consuming at least five portions of fruit and vegetables daily. The average number of portions consumed was 3.7 (SD = 3.1). Women were significantly more likely to meet the fruit and vegetable recommendations (Women = 16.4%, men = 5.5%, $P < 0.012$). There were no differences in intake based on stress levels, physical activity or hours of sleep. A recent Healthy Ireland Survey (2021) reported that the average daily number of fruit and vegetables for adults was 2.9 portions, while the students surveyed in this study consumed slightly more, with an average of 3.7 portions of fruit and vegetables daily. Future interventions should focus on increasing fruit and vegetable intake among third level students to ensure current recommendations are being met.

References

1. Department of Health Ireland (2013) *Healthy Ireland: A framework for improved health and wellbeing 2013–2025*.
2. Haynes-Maslow L, Parsons S, Wheeler S, et al. (2011) *Prev Chronic Dis* 10(E34).