

Nutritional status and lifestyle practices of undergraduates of Faculty of Science, University of Kelaniya

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The current nutrition and lifestyle of University undergraduates will determine the future health and productivity of the nation. This study was done to describe the nutritional status, dietary practices and the physical activity levels of first year undergraduates of the Faculty of Science, University of Kelaniya. A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted. Socio-demographic characteristics and dietary practices were assessed using a self-administered questionnaire. Physical activity level was evaluated using the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ). Their weight, height, waist and hip circumferences were measured. Body mass index (BMI) and waist hip ratio (WHR) were calculated. Of 350 undergraduates invited, 325 (92.9%) participated. Mean age was 21.6 (SD=1) years and 55.7% were females. Overall, 41.8% were underweight (BMI <18.5 kgm²), which included 27.8% of males and 53% of females. Overweight/ obesity (BMI >23 kgm²) was observed in 27.8% of males and 17.1% of females. A normal waist circumference (≤ 94 cm for males; ≤80 cm for females) was observed in 95.1% of males and 92.4% of females. A normal WHR (≤0.9 for males; ≤0.85 for females) was observed in 93% of males and 89.5% of females. About 55% purchased all three main meals from a canteen or a commercial food outlet. At least one main meal was purchased by 76.6%. The mean weekly metabolic equivalent of task (MET) minutes spent by the participants was 2564.8 (SD=3744). Most students (49.2%) were moderately active (600-1500 MET minutes/ week), while 28.3% were highly active (>1500 MET minutes/ week). About 23% were inactive (<600 MET minutes/ week). Inactive group included 18.8% of males and 25.4% of females. In this population, metabolic risk factors of non-communicable diseases have not manifested yet, but unhealthy dietary and physical activity patterns are observed. Healthy lifestyle policies and interventions within the University are needed to improve their lifestyle and future wellbeing.

Keywords: Diet, Non-communicable diseases, Nutrition, Physical activity, Undergraduates