

Health center says UO student leaner than average American

Obesity in the general population is about four times more prevalent than among students at the University

By Eric Martin
Oregon Daily Emerald

University students are substantially less obese on average than the general population of the United States, the University Health Center reports.

About 1,100 students here — or 5.9 percent of the 19,091 registered for fall term — are obese, according to Dr. Gerald Fleischli, director for the health center.

"It doesn't look like students are getting more obese," Fleischli said. "We've not seen that change at the average or the extremes."

The health center has tracked obesity-related statistics on campus for the last nine years. Fleischli said perhaps the limited duration of the annual study should serve as a caveat when determining a comprehensive trend among students. Nonetheless, the data points to a student population trimmer than average Americans.

"Maybe college students are not seeing the increase in obesity of the general population," Fleischli said.

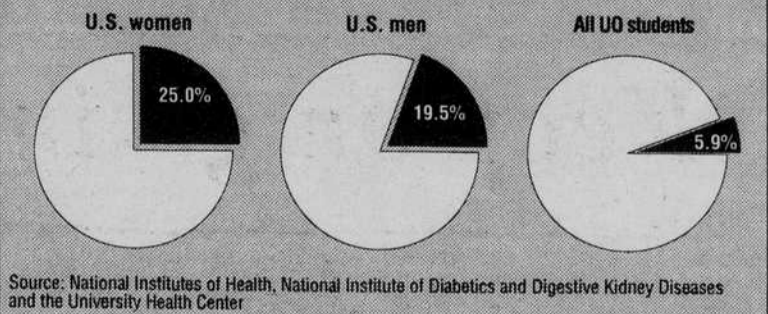
Obesity is 50 percent more common among Americans today than it was in 1960, the National Institutes of Health report. One-quarter of U.S. adults are obese and less than half register a healthy weight.

Obesity, different from being overweight, refers to an individual with an abnormally high percentage of body fat, Fleischli said. A ripped body builder could be overweight and not obese, for example, because he or she has a high concentration of muscle.

Health organizations determine obesity differently using an array of measurements. The standard is the Body Mass Index, the formula used by the health center, which calculates obesity by an individual's height and weight.

Fleischli said an individual with a BMI of 30 or greater is obese and that medical treatment isn't considered until a student reaches that point. He said the 5.9 percent of University students that are obese are 30 BMI or greater — a thresh-

Campus and U.S. obesity rates



Scott Abbs Emerald

old students can reach or exceed because of a number of factors.

"Some students are clueless about proper diet," he said. "One student told me she had a Twinkie for breakfast, herbal tea for lunch and ice cream for dinner. She was asking me, 'Do you think that's adequate?'"

There are many healthy meal choices for students as long as a balance, variety and moderation of different foods are included, said Kristen Olmos, a University health education instructor. But she said almost as important is the emotional relationship a person has with the food they eat.

"There are many people out there eating what you and I would say is a really healthy diet — grains, chicken, fruits and vegetables," she said. "But they do so at the expense of labeling the food they put in their mouths as good and bad."

Olmos said if a person knows the benefits or shortcomings of the foods they eat, a little slice of chocolate cake or a flame-broiled cheeseburger can fit into their diet without adverse effects.

"That, as opposed to giving emotions to a food," Olmos said. "If I dip my fries in ranch, I'm bad. That kind of thing."

But for some, putting on excess pounds is unavoidable even with a nutritious diet because of the genes passed on by their parents.

"Students should look at their family history and get a sense for their genetics and factor that into their food choices," health education director Paula Staight said.

Psychological factors also can contribute to obesity. Stress, trauma and low self-esteem can affect a student's eating habits, but "it

If you are interested in talking with someone about obesity, or simply want to learn more, contact:

Dr. Vivian Barnette, senior staff therapist for the Counseling and Testing Center, 346-3227 or <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~couns/el/clinical.htm>. Office located on the second floor of the University Health Center, 1590 E. 13th. Appointments on a drop-in basis.

Kristen Olmos, health education instructor for the health center, 346-2794 or <http://healthed.uoregon.edu>. Office located in the basement of the health center. Call to make an appointment.

Weight Control Information Network, established in 1994 to provide current, science-based information on obesity, physical activity, weight control and related nutritional health issues, 1-877-946-4627 or www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/winfo/winfo1.html. Call toll free.

has not been established that (obesity) is consistently associated with a psychological or behavioral syndrome," said Vivian Barnette, senior staff therapist for the Counseling and Testing Center.

Barnette said students wishing to lose weight can try one of several strategies, including working with an individual, group or team.

"The team approach might include psychologists, medical doctors, nutritionists, exercise specialists and physical therapists," Barnette said.

"Additionally, one should be knowledgeable about some of the myths, like being obese means no willpower."

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and then once we get it on a local level, then taking it to the state level — working up in a ladder approach. Getting that backing from everyone else lends a lot more credibility to the entire situation.

Q: What specific campus-oriented initiatives will you champion?

A: First of all, the energy fee we have right now was created in a time when we were having an energy crisis. Now I don't see there being as much of a need for it.

I also want to approach the issue of viewership over Ethernet that the University has.

One idea we have is to (create) a professor's day, kind of like when they used to have those teacher in-service days in high school. There's no reason why we can't have something like that at the University to show professors they are appreciated. We want to keep the good professors that we have here.

Q: How do you define diversity? And how do you plan on bringing together the diverse voices on campus?

A: I think the greatest diversity that exists within our campus, since it is primarily straight and white, is that you have to look at the people and what they're into, like what sort of music do people listen to. Are they really into sports at the University of Oregon, are they really into, say, the Survival Center? I think that's where the real diversity lies.

I would like to have some sort of event where all of these groups can come together. Things like that, I think they go a long way to kind of wake students up and say, "Wow, it's not just me that's on campus."

Q: If two student groups were at odds with each other, how would you resolve the conflict?

A: I think the first thing you have to look at is, what is for the betterment of the majority of students on campus. You just have to weigh sides, and then you have to talk to the senate; you have to talk to your executive; you have to talk to students on campus.

Q: If you could change one thing about the University instantly, what would it be?

A: I guess I would change the association people have with it as an educational institution. I don't think that on the whole there is a good enough association with the school and the education that it provides.

Q: How would you do things differently than the current ASUO Executive?

A: I like people to be kind of loose, relaxed. I don't like people to be tense. What I focus on is motivating people — getting people excited about what we're doing and showing them that there are payoffs to what they're doing, aside from just benefits to themselves. They can improve the University by just getting a little excited about things and carrying that over.

So I guess, the one thing that I would change or do differently is just be more excited about things, be more active, be more verbal. I'm not really one to jump up in front of everybody, but I also want people to know that the ASUO Exec. is willing to be there for anything anyone needs, anytime.

E-mail student activities editor Kara Cogswell at karacogswell@dailyemerald.com.

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