

What are you eating? An analysis of dietary intake measures among college students

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Introduction

- Unhealthy dietary intake may increase risk of subsequent weight-related conditions, such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, sleep apnea, and osteoarthritis.
- Emerging adulthood (18-25) is a critical time when young adults adopt dietary practices that persist into adulthood.
- It is necessary to collect accurate dietary intake among this priority population to inform the development and evaluation of future interventions.



Purpose

- To compare dietary intake measures used in research assessing dietary practices among college students.

Methods

- A critical review of dietary intake measures used in research assessing dietary practices among college students.
- Search engines included: Web of Science, PubMed, & PsychInfo
- Instruments were included if they: 1) measured dietary intake quantitatively; & 2) have been previously administered among college students

Results

Food Diaries

- Description: Individuals record detailed food intake as it happens.
- Administration time: 30 minutes or longer
- Pros: 1) Includes actual intake behaviors, 2) Open-ended to allow for specificity, & 3) Technology can ease burden
- Cons: 1) Inaccurate portion size estimations, 2) Underestimation of caloric content, 3) Insufficient detail, 4) Low literacy, & 5) Participant burden

Diet Recall

- Description: Individuals report detailed food intake at a later time.
- Administration time: 30 minutes or longer
- Pros: 1) Includes actual intake behaviors, 2) Open-ended to allow for specificity, 3) Elicits responses from trained interviewers, & 4) Technology can ease burden
- Cons: 1) Memory bias, 2) Inaccurate portion size estimations, 3) Optimistic bias, 4) Self-monitoring, 5) 1 day may not reflect "typical" intake patterns, & 6) Participant burden

Dietary Screeners

- Description: Individuals respond to a standardized instrument about general or specific food intake.
- Administration time: as short as 5 minutes
- Pros: 1) Low participant burden, 2) Standardized protocol, 3) Can focus on specific or general food or nutrient intake, & 4) Can be used for population-based comparison
- Cons: 1) May not reflect total food intake & 2) May need to consider culture when selecting screeners

Discussion

- It is recommended to use dietary screeners when assessing dietary practices of college students as they are : 1) reliable 2) easy to administer, and 3) can contribute to epidemiologic study of dietary intake.
- Reliable measurement of dietary intake among college students can aid in understanding diet-related behaviors that increase risk for weight-related conditions and inform future interventions to improve diet quality among emerging adults.