

**EVALUATION OF DIETARY BEHAVIOURS AND ASSESSMENT OF
DETERMINANTS OF DIET QUALITY AND OF STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF THE WEST INDIES ST. AUGUSTINE.**

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Background: The academic population of Trinidad and Tobago are the future and as such there is much need to ensure the proper health and nutrition of our young leaders as they go out into the world. Research has found that eating habits are established early in life. Most university students no longer live at home and eating habits typically change to adapt to the new living and studying environment. Increased levels of stress, together with poor nutrition practices, two common attributes of university life are found to be strongly linked with weight gain and decreased health.

Objective: To evaluate the eating behaviours of and determinants of diet quality among students of the St Augustine, Trinidad, and Campus of the University of The West Indies.

Design: A cross-sectional study was conducted with a sample of 275 students of the University of the West Indies (UWI) St. Augustine, Trinidad, and campus. The data collection instrument was comprised of a 21-item self-completed with an attached 24hr recall sheet. In addition the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) my pyramid tracker assessment tool was used to provide information on diet quality. Data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 12.0) for Windows. Both descriptive and inferential statistics method was used.

Results: A majority of the survey participants displayed unhealthy eating patterns with excessively high fat intakes with fibre and iron intakes below the recommended intake levels. Across various indicators of diet quality an association with location of meal consumption was observed. Residence during the semester is not associated with any change in diet quality. Students are not satisfied with the current campus cafeterias and thus do not perceive it as beneficial in promoting healthy eating habits.

Conclusion: Unhealthy eating patterns place students at risk of developing nutrition related chronic diseases and health problems. Health interventions targeted at dietary modifications and education may be implemented to educate students and make them more knowledgeable on the importance of unhealthy eating habits and food selection.