

EATING PRACTICES AND NUTRITION KNOWLEDGE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Background: The unhealthy eating practices of university students contribute to increasing their susceptibility to non-communicable diseases (NCD). Nutrition knowledge is very important in that aspect and can empower students to make informed dietary choices.

Objective: The purpose of this study is to compare the eating practices and nutrition knowledge among university students.

Design: A cross-sectional survey of 196 students was randomly selected from the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus. Students were approached and asked to complete a questionnaire that included questions on their eating practices, nutrition knowledge and demographics. Eating practices and nutrition knowledge were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Software, version 17.0.

Results: The questionnaire was completed by 196 university students (39.8 % male and 60.2 % female). The majority of students were ranked as having excellent knowledge (>8 out of 10) which was indicative of their nutrition knowledge score for that section. There was a significant difference in the mean nutrition knowledge score between males and females whose response was either yes or no to taking a course in nutrition (p -value- 0.008; mean – $2.58 \pm .577$; $2.44 \pm .545$). Students were aware of the number of food groups and foods that must be consumed the least in the diet however, 76.9 % ($n=150$) students were unaware of the food that must be consumed the most in the diet. Additionally, a total of 133 students (67.9 %) answered incorrectly to protein being the main source of energy. The majority of the students in the study (91.4 %) reported consuming fast-food while a significant difference was observed in the fast-food consumption of local and regional students (p -value- 0.006; mean- $1.96 \pm .207$; $1.80 \pm .401$).

Conclusions: The current study has revealed that students of the University of the West Indies have excellent nutrition knowledge, but eating practices do not reflect such knowledge.

