

Reality check:

Elon students' health habits defy common perceptions

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News Editor

The popular image of a sleep-deprived college student devouring Ramen noodles and guzzling caffeinated drinks does not accurately describe the typical Elon University student.

In a recent poll conducted by The Pendulum, the majority of the nearly 100 Elon students who responded indicated they sleep, on average, between seven and eight hours each night and eat three meals each day. Three respondents said they drink more than three caffeinated drinks on a daily basis.

Nevertheless, Leigh-Anne Royster, director of health promotions, said college students' health habits are a bit erratic.

"College students, for the first time, are developing habits that are not necessarily structured by parents or administration," she said. "They are thinking for the first time about eating enough meals and going to bed at a time that makes sense."

Students who developed a routine prior to entering college are

more likely to maintain a pattern throughout their four years at the university, she said. But changing schedules each semester disrupt established activity in college, according to Royster.

New experiences in college also interfere with the routine of those students who developed a standard bed time and eating habits prior to coming to Elon.

"I get a little less sleep here than at home because of work, going out later and socializing with the girls on my hall," said freshman Mary Robins.

New dining options also cause a discrepancy between Robins' diets at home and at school. While she acknowledged there were healthy options on campus, she said the amount of fat on a piece of meat served in Colonnades deterred her from eating red meat on campus, limiting her protein consumption.

"I was probably more healthy at home," she said.

Sophomore Amber Gaither expressed a similar change in eating habits. Gaither used to participate in athletics in high school, but has since stopped and recognized a decline in her health choices.

For Gaither, a typical diet consists of pasta, chicken and French fries, she said.

"In high school, I did sports, so I ate more vegetables and more healthy foods, and now that I don't do athletics I eat very badly," she said.

But, Gaither's choices are not consistent with the majority of students at Elon, according to The Pendulum's survey. A little more than 51 percent of Elon student survey respondents reported they eat a balanced meal always or most of the time, and 67 percent said they eat at least three meals each day.

"I definitely eat three meals every day, no matter what," said junior Scott Balerno.

While junior Caroline Olney said she typically eats a balanced diet, she also said she believes she ate healthier at home.

"I think I've altered my eating habits because I don't have someone making my meals for me, so they're not as good," Olney said.

Royster does not attribute a perceived decline in healthy habits to the dining options, but rather said she believes other lifestyle habits, such as social and academic engagement, limit students' choices.

Sophomore Lauren Klobutcher said her commitment to her sorority and Elon Volunteers! causes her to start her homework later and, as a result, get less sleep than she would like.

Two extremes concerning student involvement threaten the development of healthy habits, according to Royster. Students who do not exhibit any involvement in organizational activity tend not to exercise enough or eat well, she said. But, students overly involved do not prepare nutritious meals and typically consume more caffeine.

"Elon is doing a good job of helping students make healthy choices by posting caloric intake and ingredients at different dining locations, but students are working with so many habits that combat healthy eating," Royster said.

She cited body image and high engagement as two factors that hinder healthy eating habits. Royster recommended students exercise 30 to 60 minutes per day, a time she indicated as an appropriate amount, and limiting student involvement so they have time to prepare nutritious food and become informed about the products they buy.

"There are a lot of options, and they're accessible for students, but students need to take the time and be knowledgeable," she said.

She also encourages students to assess their sleeping needs. While people commonly think eight hours is the necessary amount, it depends on each individual, according to Royster.

"Awareness of one's personal bodies and personal needs is really important," she said.

Balerno specifically designed his schedule so he could sleep later more often, allowing him to sleep more this semester than during the previous two years. While Balerno said he usually slept six hours nightly, this semester he has been able to get between eight and nine hours each night.

"I definitely don't like early classes as much, so I chose my schedule carefully this year," he said.

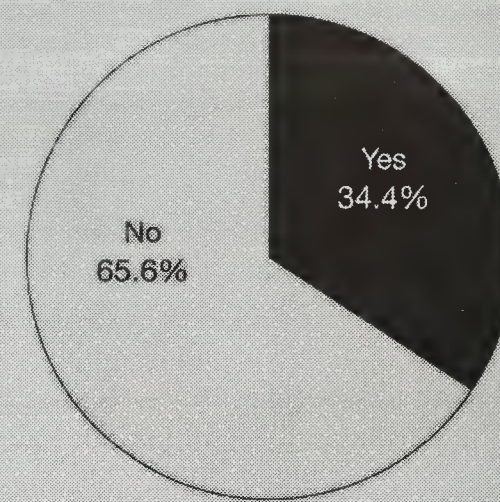
Although the change in schedule modified Balerno's sleep patterns, sophomore Steven Cockerham identified the social atmosphere has a large influence on his sleep habits.

"If other people aren't going to sleep, it's social time," Cockerham said.

Royster

CAFFEINE

Do you know how much caffeine is an appropriate daily amount?



encouraged students to discuss their personal needs with roommates so that each individual can best prepare for the proper amount of sleep.

"You're your best advocate about needing sleep and having a routine," she said.

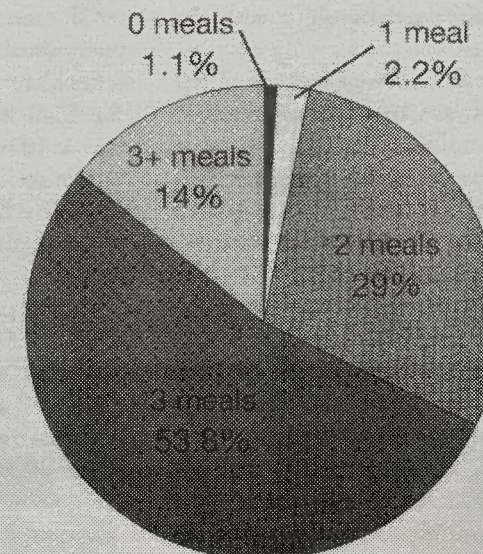
According to Royster, not getting enough sleep produced a perceived need for caffeine.

"I get less sleep, so I'm tired more often, so there's more coffee," Olney said.

Olney said her caffeine con

EATING

How many meals do you eat per day, on average?



HEALTH SURVEY RESULTS

- 97** respondents
- 93** students at Elon (results based on those who are currently students at Elon)
- 15** male respondents (16.1 percent)
- 76** female respondents (81.7 percent)
- 2** respondents identified as other (2.2 percent)