

When Auburn University freshman Vanessa Varvarezis sat down for dinner at an on-campus dining hall, she found herself overwhelmed by the highly caloric, carb-loaded options that danced before her eyes. Tempted by the delicious scents, Vanessa selected spaghetti, garlic bread, cookies and an ice cream popsicle for her meal.

Although wonderful at the moment, Varvarezis was shocked to learn that she consumed over 900 calories in one sitting.

This habit for college students, especially college freshmen, is one that is hard to break. "I think I've already gained it. My parents sent me away with four bags of junk food, and it's almost half gone already," Varvarezis said when asked about the Freshman 15.

Whether the cause is students' busy schedules between juggling school work and socializing with friends, the Freshman 15 is an issue that plagues both men and women, nutritionists say. "Some people eat to feel better since eating can have a soothing effect, and some use eating as a way of maintaining control of at least one portion of their life," Peg Abell, a nutritionist at the University of Alabama at Birmingham said.

An informal survey of dorm residents at Auburn University discovered that many rooms contained stashes of unhealthy snacks like doughnuts, popcorn, sugary cereals, sodas, and chocolate. Missy Palko, a sophomore, said, "I gained 30 pounds last year. If you look in the closets around here, they're all packed with food."

California Style Pizza manager Jim Martin says the restaurant becomes slammed with orders from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. as employees deliver up to 50 pizzas per hour to the Auburn University campus. The restaurant even brings extra pizzas along and has no problems selling them. Martin says "hawking pizzas" is a simple task for his delivery drivers.

However, nutritionists suggest that instead of placing orders at restaurants like California Style Pizza, students should opt for fruit or pretzels. Although these options might not sound like a true reward while students are in the midst of late-night study sessions, this small effort could help ward off the Freshman 15.

Some colleges have made efforts to help students adjust to the responsibilities that come with college in a more healthy manner. Schools like Tuskegee University and the University of Alabama at Birmingham have implemented workshops to teach freshmen how to avoid weight gain.

During orientation, other schools stress the importance of making efforts to find time between classes and socializing to take a small walk, play sports with friends, or go to

an aerobics class. By increasing exercise, college students can decrease their chances of gaining the Freshman 15.

Yet a study conducted by Tufts University which tracked 120 women throughout their freshman year claims that the Freshman 15 is a myth. Stephen Bailey, a sociology professor who helped conduct the study said, "Basically we came up with some result that surprised us. On average the women gained a little bit less than a pound. They gained a bit between the fall and spring and lost all of that over the course of the summer."

Yet college students like Vanessa Varvarezis would likely disagree.