

For questions 1-10 choose from the sections (A-E) in the article about dietary trends. The sections may be chosen more than once.

In which section are the following mentioned?

1. a noticeable gap in existing research _____
2. extrinsic motivation _____
3. the unimportance of social status _____
4. the unwelcome results of a certain dietary regime _____
5. a tendency to splash out on things other than food _____
6. a potential means of financing further research _____
7. a reluctance to take heed of advice given _____
8. a sector of the student population with increased awareness of healthy eating _____
9. an anecdote about former student days _____
10. a discovery which has revealed an unforeseen tendency _____

A We didn't need an in-depth research project into students' eating habits to tell us that a fair percentage of the student population eat too few vegetables. Fortunately, the UK's first study of the dietary changes brought about by going to university delves into more wide-ranging issues. And it has already unearthed a less predictable trend. Male students are particularly prone to what Dr Ricardo Costa from Coventry University calls 'disordered eating patterns'. Not to be confused with eating disorders. 'We're not talking about bulimia, anorexia and other psychological conditions; he stresses. 'That's not my field'.

B Dr Farzad Amirabdollahian, whose field is dietetics and human nutrition, and one of his colleagues have so far carried out around 130 in-depth interviews with undergraduates of both sexes. Between now and next April they hope to talk to another 270. 'That 400 will give us a really strong idea of the trends in one university; says Costa. 'From there, we hope to apply for a grant and expand the study to two more.'

C One university likely to be chosen for the study is Hertfordshire, where Amirabdollahian used to work; the other is in North Wales, where Costa did research while also working as a dietician elsewhere. 'The more I looked into the obesity epidemic, the more it became clear that there was a lot of evidence about the dietary habits of children and adults, but very little in between; he explains. 'I knew that my diet changed when I first went to university and colleagues had told me that it was the same for them. I thought it was time we looked at what living the student life is doing to your body.'

D As many as 50% of male students who have taken part in the survey seem to share with contemporaries from all walks of life a susceptibility to the blandishments of men's magazines. 'They're very focused on their body image and not just to meet Sporting needs; says Costa. Does he mean that they want to get rid of the burgeoning paunch and put on muscle to look good for women? 'Yes, that's what the trend suggests. But instead of trying to achieve it through a balanced diet as well as exercise, they're going for disordered eating - outside the norm, in other words. They're spending their money on dietary supplements such as protein powders and amino acids.' Any food to go with that? 'They tend to go for a lot of high-protein, low-fat meat, such as chicken or turkey breast from the economy or frozen ranges. Fish and chips are also one of the fast-food options for students who aren't in the habit of cooking healthy food. Oh yes, and egg whites, without the yolks.' Fruit and veg? 'Very little.' This may, of course, be a phase that many of these young men will grow out of. But if it continues, the consequences for their health could be serious. 'The liver and kidneys eventually struggle to break down an excess of protein; Costa warns, 'so liver and kidney failure is a distinct possibility in the long term. We've already seen that phenomenon among body builders. They're also going to have a deficiency in so good-quality fats. That can ultimately lead to cardiac problems. And don't forget the mental issues that will arise for those who fail to meet this idealized body image.' He would dearly love to involve psychologists as the project expands and spreads. Not only to work with young men worried about their lack of muscle, but also to find new ways of spreading the healthy-eating message across campuses. 'Posters don't seem to work', he says.

E The research, still in its early stages, already indicates a disinclination to buy what Costa calls 'proper food'. With the exception of mature students, cooking skills are low and consumption of ready meals and takeaways high. Very few respondents are eating anywhere near the 'five-a-day' fruit and vegetable intake recommended, he says. 'Females were better than males in that regard and students in the health professions were well above average. But even among them, the average was only four portions a day.' Admittedly we are talking about flats, bedsits and halls of residence in Coventry rather than a Cambridge college. But the trend seems to be common to students of all social backgrounds. 'Another finding from the early stages of our work is that parents' income and education have no apparent influence on students' dietary choices; says Costa. 'No matter if you're rich or poor, university is a level playing field.' Well, when it comes to nutritional standards, anyway.

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