



Wellness Brief: Nutrition and BMI: confidence, perception and gender trends

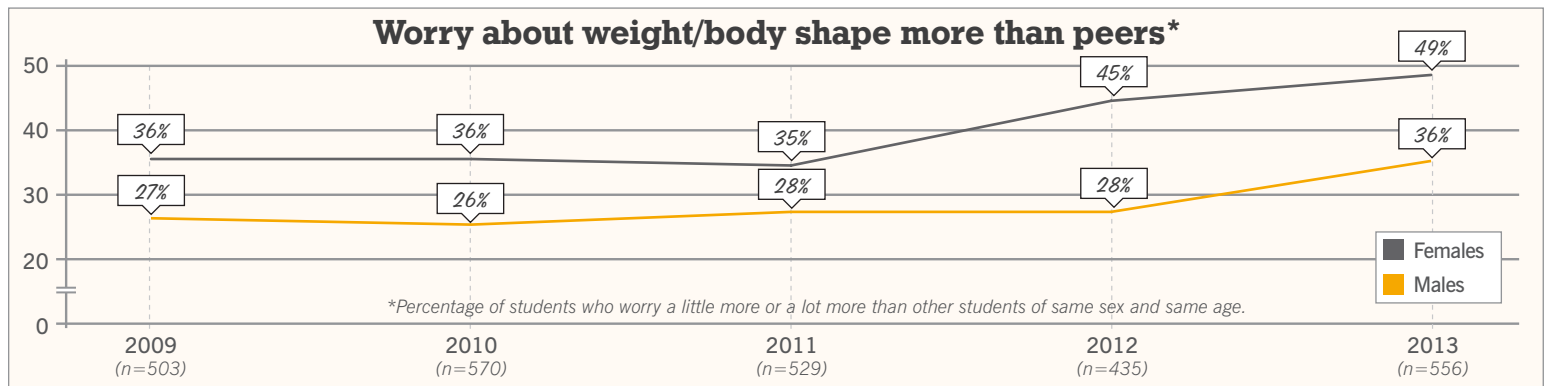
BMI

Being confident about maintaining healthy eating habits is one thing, but Body Mass Index (BMI) trends were analyzed to see what has actually been going on. BMI is a measure of body fat based on weight and height.

Healthy BMIs among students have been steadily decreasing in the past five years. Healthy BMI's decreased nine percentage points between 2008 and 2012, while BMI's classified as underweight, over weight or obese has increased by 10 during that time period. Males have not experienced drastic changes over time, however, the most recent data collected for 2012 indicates that 43% of men have an unhealthy BMI. In comparison, 33% of females report having BMI's out of the healthy range for the same year. Although men with a BMI outside of the normal range account for a larger percent of their population, the rate of change has not been progressing as fast as their female counterparts. If BMI's continue these trends, it would take less than 10 years for females to surpass males in terms of the percentage of the population that has an unhealthy BMI. In addition, over half the population of both sexes would be outside of a healthy BMI range.

So do people worry about this?

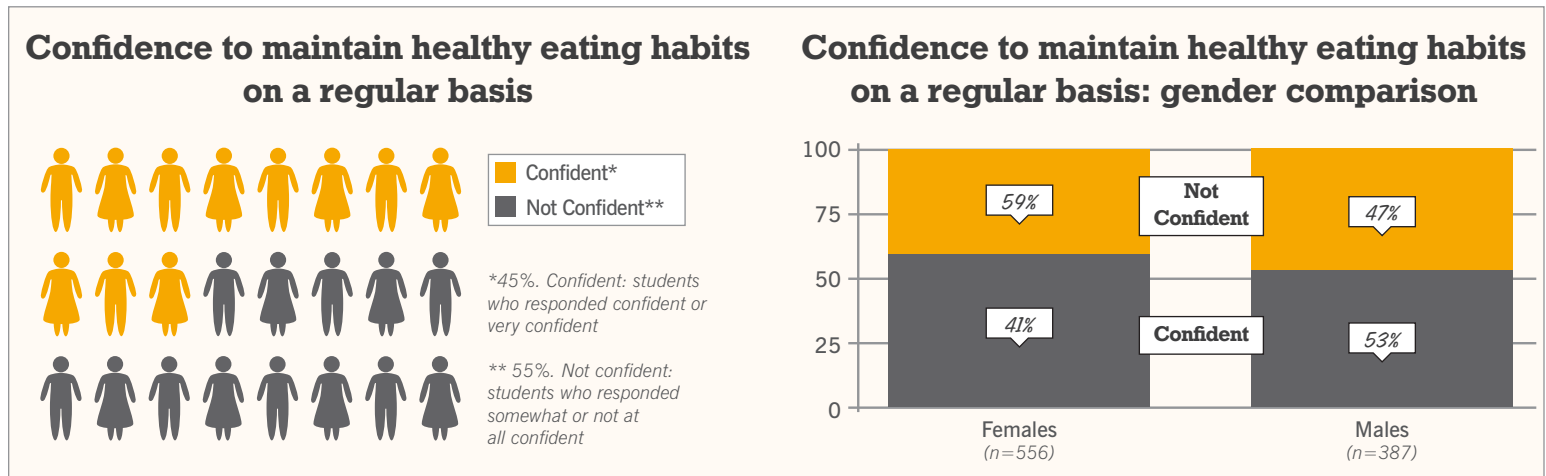
Since 2011, there has been a spike in students who claim they worry about their weight and/or body image compared to peers in their age group of the same sex. The following is data collected from Wellness Surveys from 2009 to 2013:



People claim to be concerned about weight and body image, but the data may suggest that they are unable to address this concern.

Eating Habits

Just over half of students (55%) are somewhat or not at all confident in their ability to maintain healthy eating habits on a regular basis as of 2013. When comparing differences between genders, almost 60% of females make this claim.



There are several factors that may contribute to these statistics. One area that our researchers looked at was meal and nutrition planning. 64% of students sometimes, rarely or never plan for meals, and that number jumps to 73% for snack planning. 43% never, rarely or sometimes are able to use nutrition fact information on food labels. Only 59% usually or always consider their physical health when making food choices.

Identifying the cause of these trends is beyond the scope of our research, but further studies could look at the correlation and causation between these factors.

Report prepared by the Wellness Resource Center, Department of Student Life, University of Missouri.