

# How Parents Can Help Their Child Avoid the Freshman 15

By [Jackie Burrell](#), About.com Guide

*College is a life-changing experience. Unfortunately, it can be a fattening experience, as well. And when junior walks through the door at Thanksgiving or winter break, he (or she) may do so in jeans that don't fit so well anymore. Not only is the [Freshman 15](#) no myth, that weight gain can total 20 or even 25 pounds. And having mom or dad make comments about junior having porked up is hardly an effective approach. This, however, is:*

**Understand:** No one - except perhaps Hollywood actors working on a role - sets out to gain weight. But students are being faced with a literal buffet of unlimited food choices three times a day, at a time when their fitness habits have been turned upside down. "Many students are so focused on studying," says Georgia Chavent, who directs the University of New Haven's nutrition and dietetics program. "And since they are no longer involved in a formalized high school sports program, they forget that they need to balance food intake with daily exercise." She's noticed something funny too: that brisk trot from class to class has turned into a slow saunter, because students are texting as they stroll.

**Zip It:** Anyone who gains 15 pounds knows he's gained weight. It's unnecessary and humiliating to have it pointed out. And more to the point, when parents start nagging about personal appearance, the effect is usually the very opposite of what was desired. But you can certainly ask about opportunities to get outdoors, cool classes at the gym and fun intramural sports possibilities. Your freshman may think he doesn't have time for that - or that you consider inner tube water polo frivolous - but exercise is a great way to de-stress, refresh and stay trim. Asking about [zombie tag](#) or the [game of ninja](#) gives permission, if that was even needed, to get out there and run around madly between classes.

**Stock the Fridge:** Parents also can help by stocking the dorm room fridge when they visit. Pick low-fat milk, mineral water and iced tea, not sodas. Pair sliced meats and hummus with whole grain crackers. Check the granola bar boxes, so you're buying a brand that's reasonably healthy and not a chocolate-enveloped candy bar masquerading as healthful fare. And there is no sweeter, tastier snack than crisp apples, juicy oranges and plump, seedless grapes.

**Pop the Popcorn:** Microwavable popcorn is not only expensive and unbelievably fatty, it's completely unnecessary. Show your kid the best trick ever: Drop 1/4 cup of popcorn kernels into the bottom of a brown paper lunch bag. Fold the top over about an inch, and crease. Repeat. Now microwave it for about 2 minutes, depending upon the appliance (listen carefully for the popping to slow). That's it! Perfect popcorn for mere pennies, and even if you add butter now, it's still going to have dramatically less fat than the packaged variety.

**Send a Care Package:** Send healthy treats. And if you're going the cookie route, oatmeal-raisin or peanut butter are healthier than snicker doodles or brownies, Chavent says.

**Spring for an Adventure:** Many colleges have exciting [outdoor adventure programs](#) that send students on weekend backpacking treks, for example, surf trips or kayak outings. Your kid can even borrow or rent the surfboard, kayak or backpack from the campus stash. It's a great way to de-stress, get some exercise, make new friends and possibly discover a healthful hobby he'll have for life. The costs are usually significantly less than you'd pay to do these things in your hometown, and your scholar will return to his desk refreshed and ready to hit the books again. And he'll love you for it.

"Avoiding the Freshman 15." *Tips for Parents of College Students, Teens and 20-somethings*. Web. 28 Sept. 2011. <[http://youngadults.about.com/od/Freshman\\_Yr/qt/Avoiding-The-Freshman-15.htm?nl=1](http://youngadults.about.com/od/Freshman_Yr/qt/Avoiding-The-Freshman-15.htm?nl=1)>.

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