

1-10-2022

## Brace Yourselves: College Student's Eating Habits Effects on Oral Health

Brianna McDonagh  
*Duquesne University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/duquark>

---

### Recommended Citation

McDonagh, B. (2022). Brace Yourselves: College Student's Eating Habits Effects on Oral Health. *D.U.Quark*, 6 (1). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/duquark/vol6/iss1/3>

This Staff Piece is brought to you for free and open access by Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in D.U.Quark by an authorized editor of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.

# Brace Yourselves: College Student's Eating Habits Effects on Oral Health

By Brianna McDonagh

Published January 10, 2022

*D.U. Quark* 2022. Volume 6(Issue 1) pgs. 14-18

Staff Article

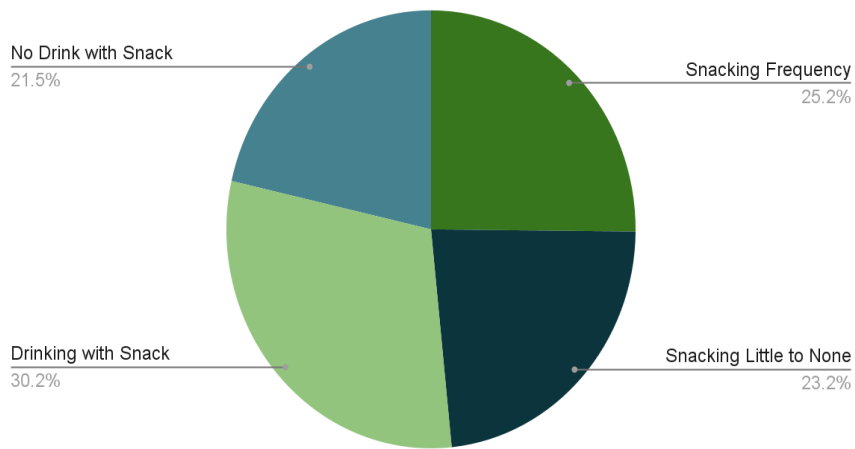
Let's be honest, we all have either slept through or forgotten to set our alarms. These close calls mean the possibility of being late to a meeting, class, or practice and may lead to students skipping meals for the sake of time. Although skipping meals doesn't bode well in any situation, students on campus *are* seen snacking between classes to fuel their bodies through the day. Snacking is helpful in certain instances, such as preventing hunger until the next meal, fueling the body and brain, and curbing cravings (3). Some snacks are better than others, however, as the cons associated with sugary snacks outweigh the benefits. Sugary and starchy snacks break down the natural bacteria in the teeth and allow the acids from the food to dissolve the enamel (2). Recalling the last article, drinking something, like water, helps balance out the acidic environment brewing in the mouth. It can be annoying to remember to wash down your snacks with water or to find time to brush in between eating, but it helps restore the mouth to its natural pH. Occasional sweet and starchy snacks are not bad, but they should not turn into a habit (2). Moderation of these snacks, while enjoying healthier snacks most of the time, is key. Healthier alternatives to consider are dried fruits, raisins, carrots, celery, apples, cheese, yogurt, nuts, rice cakes, or peanut butter (1). These snacks are not only healthier options for dental health, but they contain a lot

of nutrients that benefit overall health (1). Furthermore, savory and salty snacks are a grey area, as it depends on the number of artificial sugars present in these foods (3). The best thing you can do is be aware of what you are eating and when you are eating it. What does skipping meals or frequency of snacking have to do with oral health? The frequency of eating (or snacking) is an important factor of oral health, in addition to the types of foods being eaten throughout the day. What we eat and when we eat are two incredibly important topics to consider when discussing the health of our mouths.

To track the eating habits of college students, polls with questions that discussed preferred snack types and inquired if students are prone to skipping meals throughout their days were created and sent out to 300 answering students. To put the data collected from the polls into context, students were also asked to specify whether they are vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, or have no preference. All of these components influence snacks, eating habits, and oral health.

### Snacking Frequency with Drinking

300 college students vote on the number of times they snack, and if they drink something

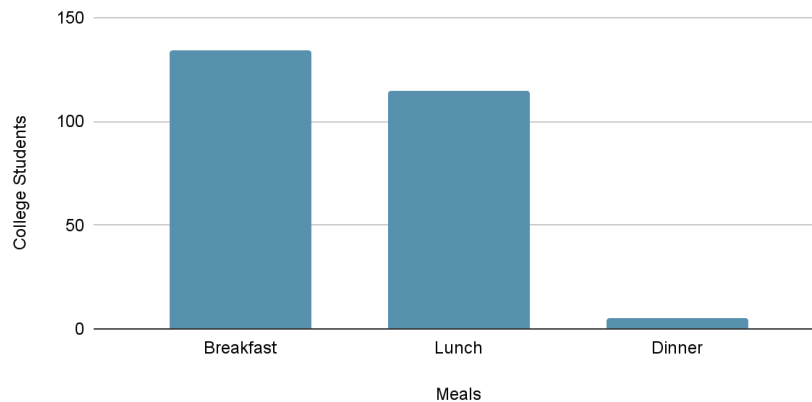


The pie chart above encompasses the 300 college students' snacking habits throughout their day. Based on the data, it seems to be an "almost even" split between snacking frequencies and the decision of drinking something or not. Understanding that some students probably do not have the time to grab a quick snack due to schedules and the same could be said of being able to grab a drink. The students who recorded that they drink and snack a few times a day may almost need to snack due to schedules, commitments, and prevent hunger until their next meal. Snacking frequency is also related to meal jumping, which is a common thing for college students.

Skipped meals can be caused by many factors such as time, school work, or a lack of options that cater to the student's needs. The graph below illustrates the most commonly skipped meals. The survey asked about the student's dependency on the dining hall. This dependency includes what type of meal they would have, or even eat anything at all. The 178 college students who answered "yes" possibly represent a portion of these numbers. This number of students can also represent those who have dietary restrictions. Out of the 300 college students that answered the survey, 24 of them are vegetarians, 11 vegans, 10 gluten-free, and 225 of them have no specific needs. Thus, if students, like the ones who have dietary needs, are skipping meals or not getting large enough portion sizes, they might rely on snacking. Depending on what they are snacking on, and the frequency of snacking, dental health may suffer at the hands of this diet. Eating snacks frequently (less than an hour or two between

## Skipped Meals

Most common meals skipped determined by 300 college students over the country



consumptions) can cause tooth decay (1). It is important to be aware of snacking habits.

The importance of this is not to discourage snacking or steer anyone away from their preferred snacks, but to serve as a reminder about brushing or even drinking water to rinse away any acidity lingering on the surface of the tooth. Furthermore, putting in the effort to keep up with a normalized meal schedule will aid in dental health. It can be difficult for college students, and even student-athletes to keep up with a normal meal schedule, but it will improve overall health. Good snacks for breaks between meals contain minimal sugar and low sodium to try to maintain the neutral pH in the mouth! Most importantly, try to aim to get three meals a day! It can be annoying and difficult with the schedules of college students, but it benefits your brain, oral health, and overall well-being.

## References:

1. Cottam, M. Snacking & your oral health.

<https://www.roseman.edu/2018/03/26/snacking-oral-health/> (accessed Nov 10, 2021).

2. Johnson, J. Ada Patient smart | snack and SIP all day? risk decay!

[https://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Publications/Files/ADA\\_PatientSmart\\_Sipping\\_Snacking.pdf?la=en](https://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Publications/Files/ADA_PatientSmart_Sipping_Snacking.pdf?la=en) (accessed Nov 10, 2021).

3. Ruxton, D. C. The best snacks for healthy teeth: Alternatives to sweets.

<https://patient.info/news-and-features/healthy-snacks-that-wont-wreck-your-teeth>  
(accessed Nov 10, 2021).

McDonagh, B. (2022). Brace Yourselves: College Student's Eating Habits Effects on Oral Health. *D.U.Quark*, Volume 6(Issue 1). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/duquark/vol6/iss1/article3>