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Dietary Restrictions Among Third Level Students in Ireland

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Individuals may limit certain foods in their diet for a range of reasons including preference, intolerance, or allergies[(1)]. Numerous factors affect an individual's diet, such as age, education, or medical necessity.

Removing certain foods or whole food groups from one's diet can result in a deficiency. Individuals may take supplements to ensure they acquire all essential nutrients and maintain overall good health[(2)]. An online questionnaire was circulated to third level students from three higher education institutes in the North-West of Ireland, between November 2020 and March 2021. This questionnaire specifically examined the student's diet and general health, including age, gender, supplement use, amount of physical activity and any current dietary restrictions. All information collected was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software version 26, using descriptive statistics. Out of 682 students, 177 students had at least one dietary restriction (21.5%). Among these 177 students, the most common restrictions reported were vegetarian (29.4%), dairy free (13%), vegan (10.7%), and gluten free (10.7%). Two thirds of the 177 students (66%) also reported being supplement users with the most common being multivitamins (30.5%), Vitamin B (15%), Vitamin D (14%) and protein powder (12%). The majority with a dietary restriction were women (n = 149, 83%) and with a reported healthy BMI (n = 139, 78%). Awareness of the main dietary restrictions applied by third level students will help inform healthy campus initiatives. Education on consuming a healthy balanced diet is important to ensure that students meet their nutritional needs and to reduce reliance on supplements. As it is clear from this study that the majority of those with dietary restriction(s) also consume supplements, further work should explore the sources and quantities of these supplements.

References

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