

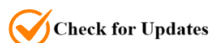
Investigation of Nutrition-Exercise Behaviors of Students Studying at the Faculty of Sports Sciences

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Abstract: The aim of this research is to investigate the nutrition-exercise behaviors of students studying at the Faculty of Sports Sciences. The research data were obtained using a survey. The research group consists of 472 students, 304 of whom are men and 168 of whom are women, studying at the Faculty of Sports Sciences of Bingöl University. As a data collection tool in the study, the 'personal information form' and the 'Nutrition-Exercise Behavior Scale' (BÖDÖ), which was prepared by the researchers Yurt et al. (2016), were used. To test the hypotheses of the research, percentage, frequency, mean, and standard deviation values were used as descriptive distribution distributions. The values of skewness and kurtosis were taken into account in assessing the normality assumptions. A T-test was used for binary variables, and one-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) was used for more than two groups. To find the differences, the LSD test was preferred among the post-hoc analyses. In addition, Pearson correlation analysis was performed for the relationships between the variables. As a result, it has been seen that as age progresses, attention is paid to meal order and healthy nutrition, and male students eat more unhealthily than female students. Besides, university canteens should offer healthier food to students instead of ready meals or convenience foods and also provide regular sports field opportunities, provided by the university, to their students.

Keywords: Nutrition, exercise, sport.

1. Introduction

Increasing our standard of living has become as important as increasing our lifespan. Exercise (physical activity) and nutrition are seen as the most important factors in aging in a healthy way or coping with health problems associated with aging. Exercise and nutrition are considered to be the most important factors for a healthy and long life. In other words, inactivity and a life without exercise and poor eating habits are emerging as a major problem for human health (Tainio et al., 2017).

Nutrition is defined by the digestion, consumption, absorption, and metabolism of nutrients needed by the body (Haspolat et al., 2016). Consuming nutrients in amounts sufficient to improve living standards, as well as to support the nutrients needed by the body to grow, develop, maintain health, and productivity reveals the importance of nutrition (Altun & Kutlu, 2015). Adequate and moderate nutrition is seen as taking and using the nutrients needed for the development of the body, repair and renewal of body tissues, and the functioning of the body. Nutrition is considered an indispensable factor for growth, development, maintenance of life, and protection of one's own health (Demirezen & Coşansu, 2005). Proper nutrition, physical activity, and healthy weight are important parts of a person's overall health and well-being. At the same time, these factors help reduce the risk of developing serious health problems such as high blood pressure and cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and stroke (Bayrakdar and Zorba, 2020). In addition, changes in the factors affecting nutritional needs or different diets can cause health problems in people (Persil, 2004).

One of the social problems in our country is poor and irregular nutrition (Fişek, 1983). University students are among the groups at risk for nutritional problems. There are studies showing that university students are not adequately fed (Tokgöz et al., 1995; Sağlam & Yurttagül, 1987). It has been observed that students' meals are irregular, they eat only one meal, they prefer to consume more ready-to-eat foods, financial problems significantly impact good nutrition, students staying in dormitories do not eat well enough due to poor dormitory conditions, they are only full (Garibağaoğlu et al., 2006; Heşeminia et al., 2002; Durmaz et al., 2002).

Along with nutrition, exercise is also considered to be important for human health. Exercise, which is accepted as a sub-dimension of physical activity, is defined as an activity that aim to improve many elements of physical fitness through planned or voluntary continuous actions (Menteş et al., 2011). Inadequate physical activity contributes to the emergence of similar chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, osteoporosis, excessive weight gain, or loss, while adequate and regular nutrition has been found to positively affect mental and physical health (Yıldırım et al., 2019; Günel et al., 2018). It is thought that regular nutrition is necessary for good health and that everyone's engagement in a routine exercise program will be beneficial for their health.

It is seen that exercise is indispensable for people to maintain their physical, psychological, and social development and daily lives, as well as basic needs such as nutrition and shelter (Karaburçak et al., 2021). Sports sciences departments in universities in our country are some of the institutions responsible for education and training regarding the physiological, physical, sociological, and psychological effects of physical activity on human health. There are five departments in these faculties, and the students studying in these departments are expected to organize various physical activities for everyone in society. They are also expected to become trainers or managers in public or private organizations in the field of sports (Şimşek & Ökmen, 2020). According to the literature, it was reported that nutrition and exercise behaviors were examined in different sample groups, and especially athletes were more balanced in these behaviors (Ataoglu et al., 2023; Yazar et al., 2023). In this context, especially the nutrition and exercise behavior tendencies of university students, who engage in sports, are of interest. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the nutrition-exercise change behaviors of students in the faculty of sport sciences.

2. Materials and Methods

Research Model: This study, which was conducted with the relational survey model, examined the nutrition-exercise behaviors of students in the faculty of sports sciences. Karasar (2015) described this model as “research models that determine the presence and/or degree of change in two or more variables”.

Research Group: In order to determine the number of samples required for the research, it was determined that at least 380 participants would be needed using G*Power bivariate correlation analysis to find an effect size of $1-\beta$ power 95%; $\alpha = 0.05$, Cohen $d = 0.03$ (Faul et al., 2007). In this context, the sample group consisted of 472 students in total; 168 female and 304 males, studying at the Faculty of Sport Sciences of Bingöl University (Table 1).

Data collection tools: In the first part of the study, a demographic information form was used to obtain information such as gender, age, height, weight, disease status, weight loss attempt and regular physical activity. In the second part of the study, the Nutrition-Exercise Behavior Scale (NEBS) was used. The scale was developed by Yurt et al. (2016) and validated for its validity and reliability. NEBS are a scale consisting of 45 items, 4 sub-dimensions, and a 5-point Likert-type scale. In addition, the scale consists of the options: "1 - It does not define me at all," "2," and "5 - It defines me completely". In the study of Yurt et al. (2016), the overall reliability coefficient of the NEBS was found to be 0.85. On the basis of sub-dimensions, the alpha coefficient was found to be 0.84 for psychological (dependent) eating behavior (PDEB), 0.77 for healthy eating-exercise behavior (HNEB), 0.72 for unhealthy eating-exercise behavior (UNEB), and 0.74 for meal pattern (MP).

Ethical Aspect of Research: This research was carried out in accordance with the decision numbered E-33117789-799-178334 dated 30.09.2024 of the Bingöl University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Commission and ethically appropriate care procedures.

Statistical analysis: SPSS 22 package program was used in the analysis, and the margin of error was set as 5%. Descriptive methods such as standard deviation, percentage, frequency, and mean were used to analyze the data. To determine the normality assumption, skewness and kurtosis values were found to be within the reference ranges of -1

and +1. In this case, it was accepted that the data obtained had a normal distribution (Büyüköztürk, 2018). (Table 2) For comparisons between two independent groups, a t-test was applied. In addition, Pearson correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationship between the variables.

3. Results

Table 1. Personal Information of Participants

Variables	Groups	Frequency(n)	Percent (%)	X
Gender	Woman	168	35,6	
	Male	304	64,4	
Age (year)				22
Height (m)				172
Body Mass (kg)				66
Diagnosed Disease Status	Yes	66	14,0	
	No	406	86,0	
Initiative to Lose Weight Status	Yes	133	28,2	
	No	339	71,8	
Is there a sport you do regularly?	Yes	251	53,2	
	No	221	46,8	

Table 2. Skewness, Kurtosis and Alpha Values of the Subscales of the Scale Used

Scales	Sub-dimensions	Skewness	Kurtosis	Alpha
NEBS	PDEB	-,350	-,031	,840
	HNEB	,221	,264	,831
	UNEB	-,346	,095	,717
	MP	-,350	-,263	,771

NEBS; Nutrition-Exercise Behavior Scale, PDEB; Psychological (Dependent) Eating Behavior, HNEB; Healthy Nutrition-Exercise Behavior, UNEB; Unhealthy Nutrition-Exercise Behavior, MP; Meal Pattern

When Table 2 is examined, it is observed that the skewness and kurtosis values of the scales used in the study are in the range of -1 to +1, as stated by Büyüköztürk (2018), and the distribution is normal. In addition, Cronbach's Alpha value ranges between 0 and 1, and reliability increases as the values approach 1 (Cronbach, 1990).

Table 3. T-Test Results of Exercise Behavior Scale Subscales According to Gender Variable

Sub-dimensions	Gender	n	X	Sd	t	p
PDEB	Woman	168	34,58	9,64	-3,621	,000*
	Male	304	37,58	7,93		
HNEB	Woman	168	39,82	9,49	-2,444	,015*
	Male	304	42,04	9,43		
UNEB	Woman	166	46,62	6,92	-3,166	,002*
	Male	304	48,59	6,17		
MP	Woman	168	18,45	4,99	-,438	,662
	Male	304	18,67	5,30		

*P<0,05; N (472) NEBS; Nutrition-Exercise Behavior Scale, PDEB; Psychological (Dependent) Eating Behavior, HNEB; Healthy Nutrition-Exercise Behavior, UNEB; Unhealthy Nutrition-Exercise Behavior, MP; Meal Pattern

When Table 3 examined, While no difference was detected in the meal pattern sub-dimension based on gender ($p>0.05$), significant differences were determined in favor of male participants in the psychological/dependent eating behavior sub-dimension ($X=37.58$, $p<0.05$); healthy eating exercise behavior sub-dimension ($X=42.04$, $p<0.05$); and unhealthy eating behavior sub-dimension ($X=48.59$, $p<0.05$).

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Test Results of the Subscales of the Nutrition Exercise Behavior Scale According to Age, Height and Weight Variables

Variables		PDEB	HNEB	UNEB	MP
Age	r	-,001	,144	,049	,131
	p	,981	,002*	,290	,004*
Height	r	,052	,075	,013	-,020
	p	,260	,102	,781	,663
Weight	r	-,037	,061	-,009	,025
	p	,424	,185	,842	,594

* $p < 0,05$; N (472) NEBS; Nutrition-Exercise Behavior Scale, PDEB; Psychological (Dependent) Eating Behavior, HNEB; Healthy Nutrition-Exercise Behavior, UNEB; Unhealthy Nutrition-Exercise Behavior, MP; Meal Pattern

When Table 4 examined, no difference was found in the sub-dimensions of the scale based on the participants' age, height, and weight variables. A low-level positive relationship was found between the age status variable and the sub-dimensions of healthy eating and exercise behavior ($r=0.144$; $p < 0.05$) and meal pattern ($r=0.131$; $p < 0.05$).

Table 5. T-Test Results of Nutrition Exercise Behavior Scale Subscales According to Diagnosed Disease Status Variable

Sub-dimensions	DDS	N	X	Ss	t	p
PDEB	Yes	66	34,58	9,55	-1,968	,050
	No	406	36,84	8,50		
HNEB	Yes	66	40,56	10,73	-,631	,528
	No	406	41,36	9,30		
UNEB	Yes	66	47,39	7,57	-,673	,501
	No	404	47,98	6,32		
MP	Yes	66	18,50	5,55	-,157	,875
	No	406	18,61	5,14		

* $p < 0,05$; N (472), DDS; Diagnosed disease status, NEBS; Nutrition-Exercise Behavior Scale, PDEB; Psychological (Dependent) Eating Behavior, HNEB; Healthy Nutrition-Exercise Behavior, UNEB; Unhealthy Nutrition-Exercise Behavior, MP; Meal Pattern

When Table 5 examined, no difference was found in the sub-dimensions of the nutrition exercise behavior scale of the participants according to the diagnosed disease status ($p > 0.05$).

Table 6. T-Test Results of the Nutrition Exercise Behavior Scale Sub-dimensions According to Intervention Status in Line with Weight Loss Goal

Sub-dimensions	SİLW	N	X	Ss	t	p
PDEB	Yes	133	34,68	8,38	-2,916	,004*
	No	339	37,25	8,70		
HNEB	Yes	133	41,24	10,70	-,007	,994
	No	339	41,25	9,00		
UNEB	Yes	132	46,98	6,38	-1,898	,058
	No	338	48,25	6,53		
MP	Yes	133	18,86	5,00	,692	,490
	No	339	18,49	5,27		

* $p < 0,05$; N (472) SİLW; Status of the initiative to lose weight, NEBS; Nutrition-Exercise Behavior Scale, PDEB; Psychological (Dependent) Eating Behavior, HNEB; Healthy Nutrition-Exercise Behavior, UNEB; Unhealthy Nutrition-Exercise Behavior, MP; Meal Pattern

When Table 6 examined, there was a significant difference in the psychological/dependent eating behavior sub-dimension ($X=37.25$, $p < 0.05$) between individuals who did not attempt to lose weight and those who made an effort to lose weight.

Table 7. T-Test Results of Nutrition Exercise Behavior Scale Subscales According to Regular Sports Participation

Sub-dimensions	SPRB	N	X	Ss	t	p
PDEB	Yes	251	37,26	8,16	1,971	,049*
	No	221	35,68	9,18		
HNEB	Yes	251	45,09	8,97	10,380	,000*
	No	221	36,88	8,12		
UNEB	Yes	250	48,43	6,82	1,918	,056
	No	220	47,28	6,08		
MP	Yes	251	19,61	4,89	4,612	,000*
	No	221	17,44	5,29		

* $p<0,05$; N (472), SPRB; A sport that is practiced on a regular basis, NEBS; Nutrition-Exercise Behavior Scale, PDEB; Psychological (Dependent) Eating Behavior, HNEB; Healthy Nutrition-Exercise Behavior, UNEB; Unhealthy Nutrition-Exercise Behavior, MP; Meal Pattern

When Table 7 examined, no difference was found in the sub-dimensions of unhealthy eating and exercise behavior according to the participants' regular sports participation status ($p>0.05$). In addition, significant differences were found in favor of the participants who answered 'yes' in terms of psychological/addictive eating behavior ($X=37.26$, $p<0.05$), healthy eating exercise behavior ($X=45.09$, $p<0.05$), and meal pattern sub-dimensions ($X=19.61$, $p<0.05$).

4. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the nutrition and exercise habits of students at the Faculty of Sports Sciences. The findings revealed significant insights regarding the levels of nutrition and exercise behaviors among these students. No gender differences were observed in the meal pattern sub-dimension. However, significant differences favoring male participants emerged in the sub-dimensions of psychological/addictive eating behavior, healthy eating behavior, and unhealthy eating behavior related to exercise. In line with these results, [Yarar et al. \(2023\)](#) reported no gender differences in scores on the Behavioral Exercise Diet Scale (NEBS) among adolescent athletes. Our findings suggest that the psychological/addictive eating behavior, healthy eating-exercise behavior, and meal pattern sub-dimensions exhibit parallel trends. Additionally, male students demonstrated lower cooking skills at home compared to females, leading to a higher frequency of eating out and subsequently poorer dietary habits. This finding aligns with previous research emphasizing psychosocial and environmental factors affecting dietary behaviors in young adults ([Yıldız & Varsak, 2024](#)).

Regarding age, no significant relationships were found in the psychological/addictive eating or unhealthy eating-exercise sub-dimensions. Conversely, significant associations appeared in the healthy eating, exercise performance, and daily organization sub-dimensions. These results partially diverge from [Aykut et al. \(2021\)](#), who identified significant age-related differences only in the meal pattern sub-dimension. The observed divergence might be due to the complexity of behavioral patterns, where healthy eating shows some inconsistencies with exercise behaviors but overlaps with meal pattern tendencies. As students age, they tend to develop more mature eating habits and prefer healthier food choices, supporting the notion of age-related positive dietary evolution ([Ayaz-Alkaya & Kulakçı-Altıntaş, 2021](#)).

No significant differences emerged in any NEBS sub-dimensions according to students' height and weight status. The literature appears scarce regarding the relationship between anthropometric measures and NEBS Sub-dimensions, indicating a gap warranting future investigation. Similarly, no significant effects of diagnosed disease status on nutrition and exercise behaviors were detected, and existing studies have scarcely addressed this relationship ([Orhan & Muslu, 2024](#)).

A significant difference was found solely in the psychological-dependent eating behavior sub-dimension in relation to participants' weight loss attempts. [Akan \(2018\)](#), however, reported differences only in the unhealthy eating behavior sub-dimension under similar conditions. This discrepancy suggests that while psychological/dependent eating behavior and unhealthy eating-exercise behavior sub-dimensions may diverge, meal pattern and healthy eating-exercise behavior sub-dimensions tend to converge. Therefore, students attentive to their meals are likely to maintain healthier diets and better weight control ([Akan, 2018](#)).

Differences were also identified in psychological/dependent eating behavior, healthy eating-exercise behavior, and meal pattern sub-dimensions based on participants' regular sports participation. Akan (2018) found no differences except in the psychological (dependent) eating behavior sub-dimension. Our findings indicate some contradictions regarding psychological/dependent eating behavior and unhealthy eating-exercise behavior sub-dimensions but confirm congruence in meal pattern and healthy eating-exercise behavior. These results imply that students engaged in regular physical activity pay more attention to their dietary habits and tend to make healthier food choices without skipping meals (Malkoç et al., 2020).

In summary, this study demonstrates the interconnected nature of nutrition and exercise behaviors among sports science students. Variables such as gender, age, weight loss attempts, and regular sports participation influence specific behavioral sub-dimensions. Consistent with the literature, the findings underscore the importance of developing targeted educational programs to enhance healthy lifestyle behaviors among university students (Lucini et al., 2024; Tosun et al., 2024).

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings suggest that with increasing age, individuals tend to pay greater attention to maintaining regular meal patterns and adopting healthier eating habits. Male students were found to engage in less healthy dietary behaviors compared to female students. These results highlight the need for university cafeterias to provide healthier food options instead of fast food or ready-to-eat meals. Moreover, it is recommended that universities offer students accessible facilities and spaces for regular physical activity. Additionally, it was observed that students with higher monthly incomes are more likely to maintain healthy eating habits and avoid skipping meals, which appears to positively contribute to their psychological well-being.

Limitations

Despite providing meaningful insights into the nutrition and exercise behaviors of sports science students, this study has certain limitations. First, the study sample consisted solely of students from a single faculty, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other populations or disciplines. Additionally, data collection was based on self-reported measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias or inaccurate recall. The cross-sectional design also prevents the establishment of causal relationships between variables. Future research would benefit from longitudinal studies with more diverse and representative samples, incorporating objective measurements of dietary intake and physical activity levels.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement: The data is publicly available.

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