

Mindful Eating and Perceived Stress in College Students

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Objectives (purpose): Evidence suggests that in college student populations, stress levels often manifest as maladaptive eating and/or functional gastrointestinal disorders. These conditions can degrade wellbeing and academic performance if not addressed. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between students' perceived stress, their overall mindfulness, and mindful eating patterns. Gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms and bowel habits were also investigated to determine whether these factors were stress-related or influenced mindfulness behaviors.

Design, Methods and Instruments: An online survey was conducted during the 2020-2021 academic year. Demographic information, including smoking, alcohol, and drug use patterns, was gathered along with the validated Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and a non-validated Mindful Eating Self-Assessment (MESA).

Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations were obtained using SPSS.

Results: Statistically significant negative correlations were observed between scores on the PSS and MAAS ($r = -0.471$, $p < 0.01$), as well as between the PSS and MESA ($r = -0.314$, $p < 0.01$). No significant relationships were observed between any alternative coping mechanisms (smoking, alcohol, drug use) and stress, mindfulness, or mindful eating. Similarly, no significant correlations were found between the validated tools and GI parameters.

Conclusions: Overall, the observation of an inverse relationship between stress and both mindfulness and mindful eating in college students highlights a need for future studies and mindful eating interventions in this population.

Conflict of interest / funding disclosure statement:

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