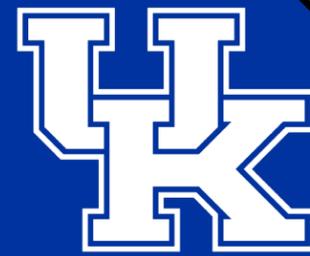


Understanding College Student Awareness of Cancer Risk Prevention: Screening and Perception of Dietary Influence



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Introduction

With cancer as one of the leading causes of death, primary prevention measures early in the lifecycle are of relentless importance. Formative understanding of young adult cancer prevention knowledge can aid in development of future programming.

Objectives

Assess college student knowledge and perceptions regarding cancer prevention.

Methods

A sample of 2,350 college students at a southeastern university were random selected from undergraduate student records for a cross sectional anonymous online survey.

Data collected included demographics (sex, age, and race), self perceived health rating (fair/poor, good, very good/excellent), knowledge of age/frequency for cancer screenings (breast, colon, cervical, lung, and prostate), and likert item questions (perceptions of diet and lifestyle-related cancer risk behaviors) on a scale of definitely not true (1) to definitely true (5). Pearson chi-square and Wilcoxon Rank Sum test were used.

Cancer Screening	Correct	Incorrect
Pap smear age	8.2%	91.8%
Pap smear timing	14.3%	85.7%
Mammogram age	21.6%	78.4%
Mammogram timing	52.0%	48.0%
Colon age	6.8%	93.2%
Prostate age	2.8%	97.2%
Lung age	6.8%	93.2%

Likert Item	Rating in order (1-5)
Smoking may cause cancer	4.89±0.38
Family history of cancer may be a risk factor for personal cancer risk	4.55±0.67
Exposure to certain heavy metal and chemicals may cause cancer	4.51±0.69
Cancer has hereditary factors	4.50±0.65
A balanced diet may reduce cancer risk	4.00±0.76
High fat diets may cause cancer	3.66±1.05
Eating fruits and vegetables may prevent cancer	3.56±0.87
Diets rich in meat may cause cancer	3.25±0.95
Salty food may cause cancer	2.95±0.98
Eating burned food may cause cancer	2.60±1.06
Eating spicy foods may cause cancer	2.31±0.93
Eating excessively hot foods may cause cancer	2.27±0.86

Results

Students (n=144) were white, female, and average of 20 years old. For timing of cancer screening (age/frequency) 78% or more students answered incorrectly on all items except frequency of mammograms (52% correct). Students agreed UV rays, cigarette smoking, family history, and exposure to certain metals/chemicals may cause cancer but were less certain on dietary impact of cancer risk/prevention (consuming salty, hot, high fat, meats, burned, or spicy foods). Agreement that “smoking may cause cancer” was more agreed with (4.89±0.38 of 5) than “high fat diets may cause cancer” (3.66±1.05) and “diets rich in meat may cause cancer” (3.25±0.95). Males (p=.01), and those rating health as very good/excellent (p=.03), perceived salty foods as causing cancer.



Conclusions

While college students are aware of typical cancer risk behaviors such as smoking and UV rays, dietary influence was less agreed upon. **There is a need for more innovative, long-term interventions on nutrition education and behaviors related to cancer prevention among college students to reduce cancer risk across the lifespan.**