

Students eat healthier but first year syndrome is still evident



These days, some students prefer sushi over hamburgers. So says Mr Isaac Moloï, who works at Noodlebosch, a shop that sells sushi, among other foods, in the Neelsie Students' Centre. Students are notorious for their unhealthy eating habits, but will the international surge in the culture of wellness change the eating habits of students? Susan Smit and Carolyn Meads, two Journalism students, set out to investigate.

Over the past few years, a number of shops have opened in the Neelsie that offer healthier choices. Ms Debbie Nanisa, who works at Buzz, says they sell fruit, juice and salads. Ms Huibrecht Kruger, co-owner of 3Degrees, says she does not use mayonnaise or too much oil and removes the fat from bacon.

Older shops in the Neelsie are also making an effort to meet the demand for healthier food. Mr Niel Cleghorn, manager of Nca'kos, says their products are healthy because they serve cooked meals. "We use a bit of cheese sauce and some fattening ingredients, but you will find that everywhere. That is what makes eating food fun," he says.

But there are still unhealthy meals in the Neelsie. Kelly Alcock (18), a BA International Studies student, says she tries to stay away from the "chip factories". "Unfortunately, chips are much cheaper than salads."

Dieter Vonfintel (26), a lecturer in Economics, says it is very difficult for someone who's single to eat healthily. "One tends to eat out a lot." Mathildie Stemmet (19), a BA student, brings her own meals to campus, because it is cheaper and healthier than the food in the Neelsie.

And then there are students who want the unhealthy meals in the Neelsie. Bertie Barnard, who is busy with a PhD in Chemistry, says: "If you feel like a hamburger, have one. If you are worried about getting fat, exercise." Ms Anjo Aploon, an employee at the London Pie Company, says: "Students actually live very unhealthy. Some eat about two pies every day." London Pie Company currently is the only Halaal-certified shop in the Neelsie.

Last year, three new caterers were appointed for the residences.

According to Ms Bettie Preller, manager of residence services, the new caterers, just like their predecessors, have to meet specific requirements. They have to provide meals that consist of protein, starch, two vegetables, a salad, dessert and fruit juice. The new caterers could provide food more cheaply, and many students were concerned that the portion sizes would suffer. Students can now eat three meals at their residences for about R30 a day. Wouter van Velden, head student of the mixed residence Metanoia, says: "Men and women get the same size portions. This can become a problem and many of the guys end up filling up with bread."

In general, the students living in residences with whom Matieland spoke felt that the food provided by the new caterers was just as healthy, if not healthier, than the previous food. Students in Lydia say they get chicken wraps, smoked chicken salad and brown bread rolls. Ronel van Tonder, deputy head

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Nahn van Wyk and Shanie Vermaak enjoy a breakfast in the Neelsie.

student of Harmonie, said: "The most popular meal is still the chicken burgers and chicken schnitzel." However, she added: "There are still days on which your squashes do not look appetising." Marthine Herbert of Heemstede says they miss the health

choice that their previous caterers provided. Amy-Jean Prentice (19), a Visual Communication student in Harmonie, says she does not eat all her residence meals, as they contain too many carbohydrates. She also recommends that some of the eating places in the Neelsie should

update their menus to provide healthier options.

Ms Karin Haasbroek, dietician at the Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD), reckons that there is definitely a group of students who want to live more healthily. However, she believes that there are many who still eat unhealthy. "I see many male students with fat waists," she says. "More men today have larger waistlines than when their parents were students." According to Ms Haasbroek, students underestimate the calorie content of alcohol. "It not only makes you drunk, it also makes you fat." She says many students struggle with weight gain in their first year on campus - the so-called first-year syndrome.

Ms Haasbroek says it depends on the students whether Neelsie and the residences offer healthy food. "It is a case of supply and demand. They will not offer whole-wheat bread, fruit and salads if there is no demand for it."