

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**NUTRITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN
RELATION TO HEALTHY LIFESTYLE ADHERENCE AMONG
UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA (UKM) STUDENTS**

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ABSTRACT

University students face increasing challenges in maintaining a healthy lifestyle due to academic pressure, changing living conditions, and limited time. While nutritional knowledge and physical activity are known contributors to health behaviors, the relationship between these factors and lifestyle adherence remains underexplored among Malaysian university students. This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of nutritional knowledge and physical activity status on adherence to a healthy lifestyle among health science and non-health science students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). A cross-sectional study was conducted among 169 undergraduate students from the health science and non-health science faculties. Participants completed a self-administered questionnaire incorporating the General Nutrition Knowledge Questionnaire (GNKQ), the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ), and selected domains of the Health-Promoting Lifestyle Profile II (HPLP-II). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, independent t-tests, and Pearson correlation. Health science students scored significantly higher in nutritional knowledge compared to non-health science students ($p < .05$). However, no significant difference in physical activity levels was observed across academic disciplines. The majority of students demonstrated moderate adherence to healthy lifestyle behaviors. A weak but statistically significant correlation was found between physical activity and healthy lifestyle adherence ($p < .05$), while the relationship between nutritional knowledge and lifestyle adherence was also significant but weak. Although nutritional knowledge and physical activity contribute to healthy lifestyle behaviors, their influence alone is insufficient. Psychosocial and institutional barriers likely moderate students' ability to translate knowledge into consistent health behaviors.

Keywords: nutritional knowledge, physical activity, healthy lifestyle adherence, university students, Malaysia

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Background

Health promotion is an essential approach for improving individual well-being and reducing the prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which are more common owing to detrimental lifestyle habits such as unhealthy food, tobacco use, alcohol use, and physical inactivity (Bermeo et al., 2024b). Concerns are escalating regarding the inadequate mental health of university students, characterized by diminished mental well-being, abnormally low levels of self-efficacy, autonomy, or competence, and an inability to cope with typical life stressors or to function productively (Malagodi et al., 2023b). Among university students, maintaining a healthy well-being while having to face daily academic pressures along with time and environmental constraints, is challenging. However, research indicates that students maintain unhealthy lifestyles despite receiving education on these issues (Bermeo et al., 2024a).

According to Bermeo et al. (2024a), health-promoting behaviors start from actions aimed at achieving favorable health outcomes, including optimal well-being, personal fulfillment, and productive living. The WHO stresses that a healthy diet is essential for good health. Many studies support that dietary habits are shaped through nutritional knowledge. Nutritional knowledge may be influenced by several circumstances, including socioeconomic conditions. The educational level has been demonstrated to be a significant factor affecting the community's nutritional awareness (Mohd Ghazali et al., 2024). Although university students, specifically those in health sciences, are academically exposed to this knowledge, dietary intake is often related to awareness and self-perception of the individuals (Scalvedi et al., 2021c). Similarly, physical activity plays a significant role in health, and has various psychological benefits, especially for university students such as enhanced cognition, increased brain function, and superior academic achievement,