Immigrants Reach U.S. Levels of Obesity Within 15 Years

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In attempt to fit in with their peers and seem more “American,” immigrants who move to the United States tend to choose high-calorie, fatty foods over their healthier diets, according to a study published in the journal *Psychological Science* and reported by HealthDay News.

“People who feel like they need to prove they belong in a culture will change their habits in an attempt to fit in,” said Sapna Cheryan, an author of the study and assistant professor of psychology at the University of Washington. “If immigrants and their children choose unhealthy American foods over healthier traditional foods across their lives, this process of fitting in could lead to poorer health.”

For the study, researchers surveyed minority college students and white college students and asked them questions about embarrassing childhood memories and favorite foods. While 68 percent of minority college students admitted to having embarrassing memories related to food, only 27 percent of white college students said the same.

And after being questioned about their ability to speak English, 75 percent of minority students identified an American dish as their favorite food. Of the students who were not questioned about their ability to speak English, only 25 percent of minority students choose an American food as their favorite.

Moreover, those who chose the more typical American food ended up eating an extra 182 calories, 12 grams of fat and 7 grams of saturated fat. This attempt to fit in is one reason why immigrants reach U.S. levels of obesity within 15 years of moving to America.

Researchers concluded that social pressures contributed to most students’ choices.

“In American society today, being American is associated with being white,” Cheryan said. “Americans who don’t fit this image even if they were born here and speak English feel that pressure to prove that they’re American.”

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