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Oakland University receives grant for study on weight gain risk in early college students

A new study at Oakland University will investigate whether changes in students' sleep patterns during the first two years of college are linked to risk factors for weight gain, obesity, and other cardio-metabolic issues.

"Basically, we're going to recruit new students at Oakland University and we're going to follow them over their first two years in college," said **Dr. Scott Pickett**, an associate professor of psychology at OU who specializes in risk and recovery factors for anxiety.

"We're going to look at changes in sleep or patterns of sleep. We're going to see if there are different groups of students who have the same patterns of sleep, and if those various patterns are related to changes in eating, exercise and other behaviors, and subsequently changes in body composition and weight distribution."

Pickett has teamed up with **Dr. Andrea Kozak**, an associate professor of psychology who specializes in obesity research, to conduct the study, which is entitled "Examination of Habitual Sleep: Trajectories Across the First Two Years of College: Relation to Weight Gain Risk Behaviors and Outcomes."

"Creating the proposal for this project was really a team effort," Kozak said. "I think we were successful in obtaining funding for this study because NIH appreciated that we are bringing together our different areas of expertise in a way that makes sense."

The study, which will involve 300 Oakland University students, is being funded via a \$426,251 grant from the **National Institutes of Health**

"We've done some pilot testing and some smaller studies to show that this kind of research is needed and that it can be done, but a study this size really has to have the kind of funding that we've been able to secure from the NIH," Pickett said.

According to Kozak, participants in the study will be asked to wear a device that will track their sleep patterns, and another that will monitor their physical activity.

"We're also going to look at the participants' use of technology," Kozak said. "We believe technology provides people with more opportunity to engage in sedentary behavior, which is an important risk factor for weight gain."

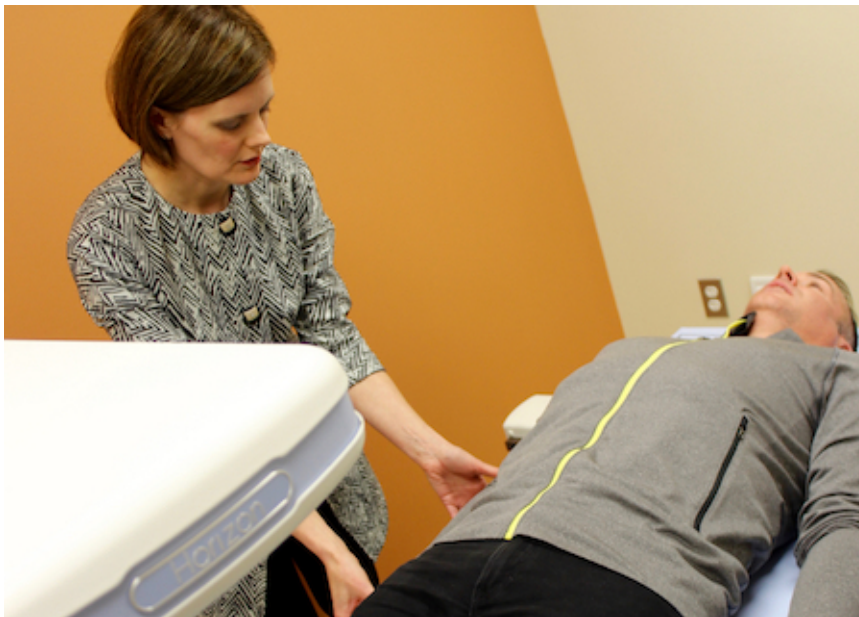
Participants in the study will also be asked to keep track of their food and beverage intake, and input the information into a system created by the **National Cancer Institute**.

"The participants will not be recording every day for the whole time they're in the study," Kozak said. "There will be particular times they are recording over the course of the study."

According to Pickett, the term of the NIH grant is for a three-year period.

"I think one of the things that is novel about our study is that previous research has shown people after they've already developed a weight problem, diabetes, etc.," he said. "They kind of say, 'look, these two things might be linked,' but they may miss that critical period when the problems developed and that's why we wanted to study a younger group."

Individuals interested in participating in the study will have an opportunity to "opt in" during the university's **New Student Orientation** process next year.



Drs. Andrea Kozak and Scott Pickett of Oakland University demonstrate proper placement on a dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DEXA) machine, which will be used to measure the total percentage of body fat in study participants.