

# DIETARY HABITS AMONG TERTIARY SPORT SCIENCE STUDENTS



Asanka Ranasinghe and Dr Peter S. Maulder  
Centre for Sport Science and Human Performance  
Wintec, Hamilton, New Zealand



## INTRODUCTION

- Tertiary students are widely recognized to be more inclined to engage in unhealthy lifestyles and behaviors, which, involves unhealthy eating behaviors that are brought on by excessive consumption of snack foods, convenience foods, fast foods, and insufficient intake of healthy and nutritious foods, such as fruits and vegetables (1).
- These lifestyles and behaviors they adopt, especially with regards to their eating habits, during their years spent at university/tertiary education, are not just critical in deciding the quality of lifestyle and eating habits of their subsequent adulthood, but additionally on the health of the individual, in the long term (2).

## PURPOSE

- To examine the dietary habits of tertiary level students through a sample of students from Wintec's Centre for Sport Science and Human Performance and to make available data that would assist in highlighting the importance of developing support services and education programs, particularly at Wintec, in nutrition that promote healthy food choices and eating habits.

## METHODS

- The study design was a cross-sectional survey, conducted among the students at the Centre for Sport Science and Human Performance at Wintec.
- A semi-structured questionnaire was compiled using the Qualtrics Survey Software System, comprising of 21 questions, related to dietary habits. This questionnaire was based on the questionnaire used in the study "University Student Food Attitudes and Behavior Survey" by Devine, Lloyd and Gray (2006) (3).
- The survey was distributed among the students currently enrolled in Certificate, Bachelor's Degree, Graduate Diploma and Postgraduate Programs.
- Ethical clearance was obtained from the Wintec Research Office, to conduct this study.
- The collected data was analyzed through IBM SPSS statistics software. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the responses to all the questions.

## RESULTS

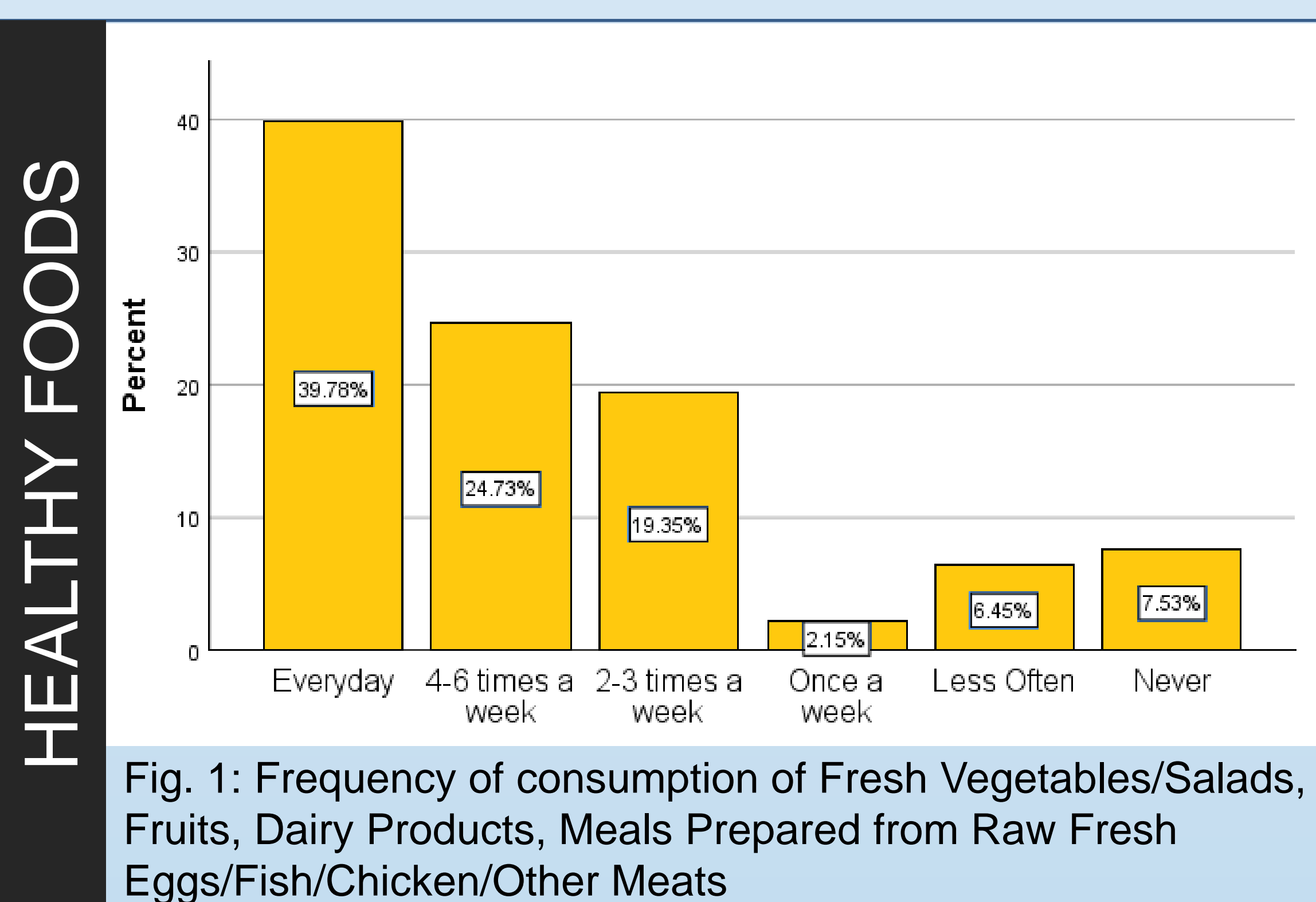


Fig. 1: Frequency of consumption of Fresh Vegetables/Salads, Fruits, Dairy Products, Meals Prepared from Raw Fresh Eggs/Fish/Chicken/Other Meats

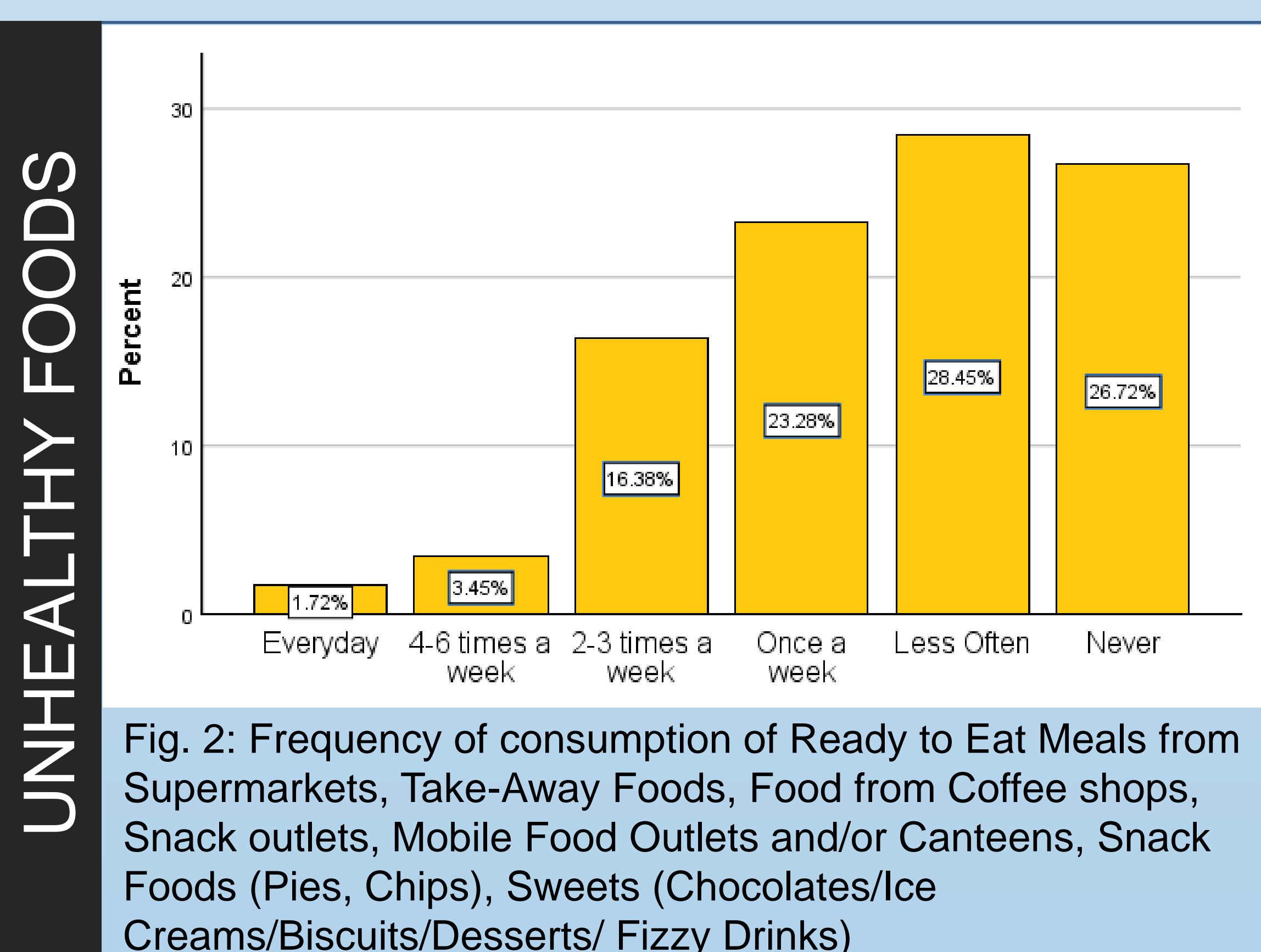


Fig. 2: Frequency of consumption of Ready to Eat Meals from Supermarkets, Take-Away Foods, Food from Coffee shops, Snack outlets, Mobile Food Outlets and/or Canteens, Snack Foods (Pies, Chips), Sweets (Chocolates/Ice Creams/Biscuits/Desserts/ Fizzy Drinks)

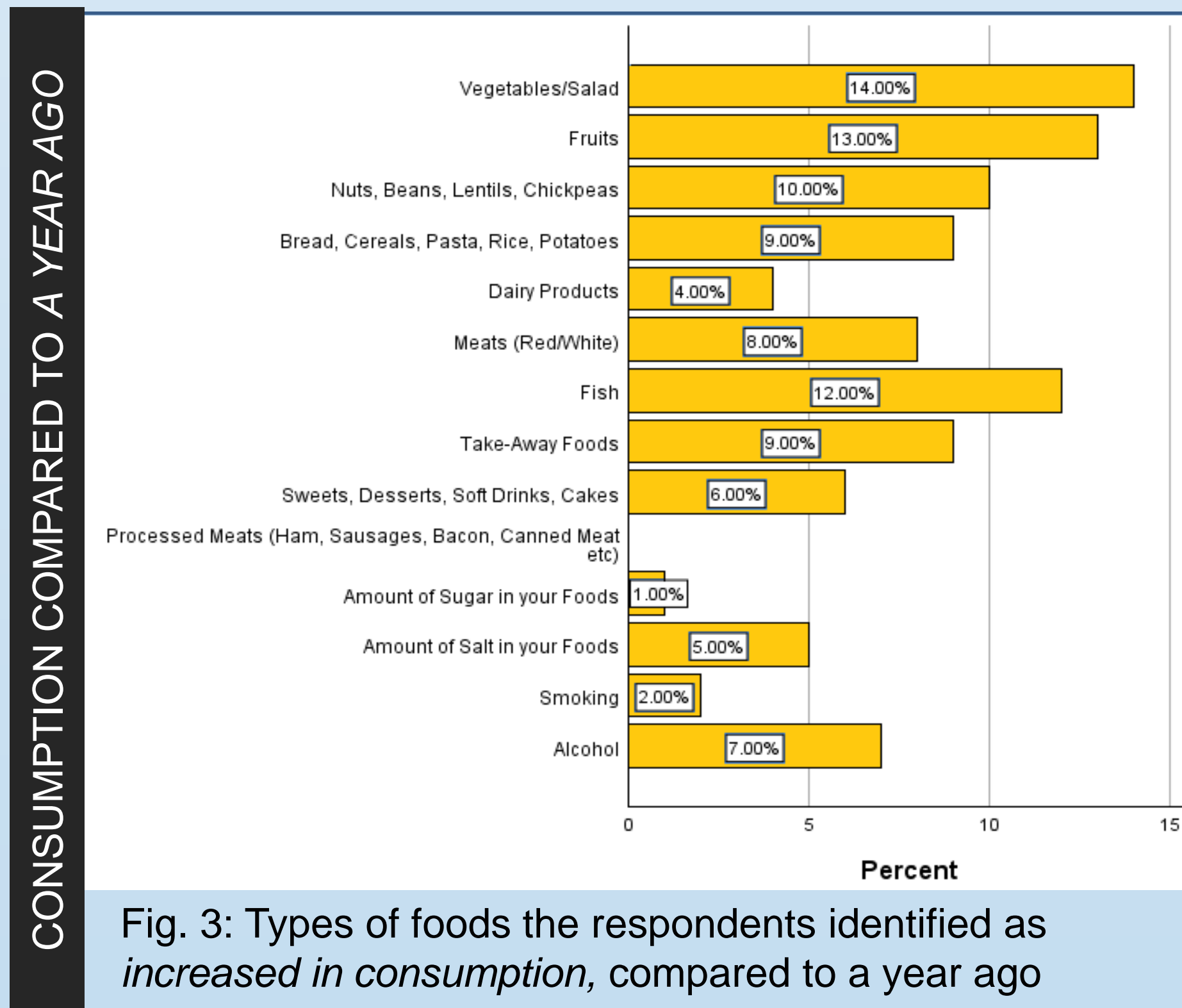


Fig. 3: Types of foods the respondents identified as increased in consumption, compared to a year ago

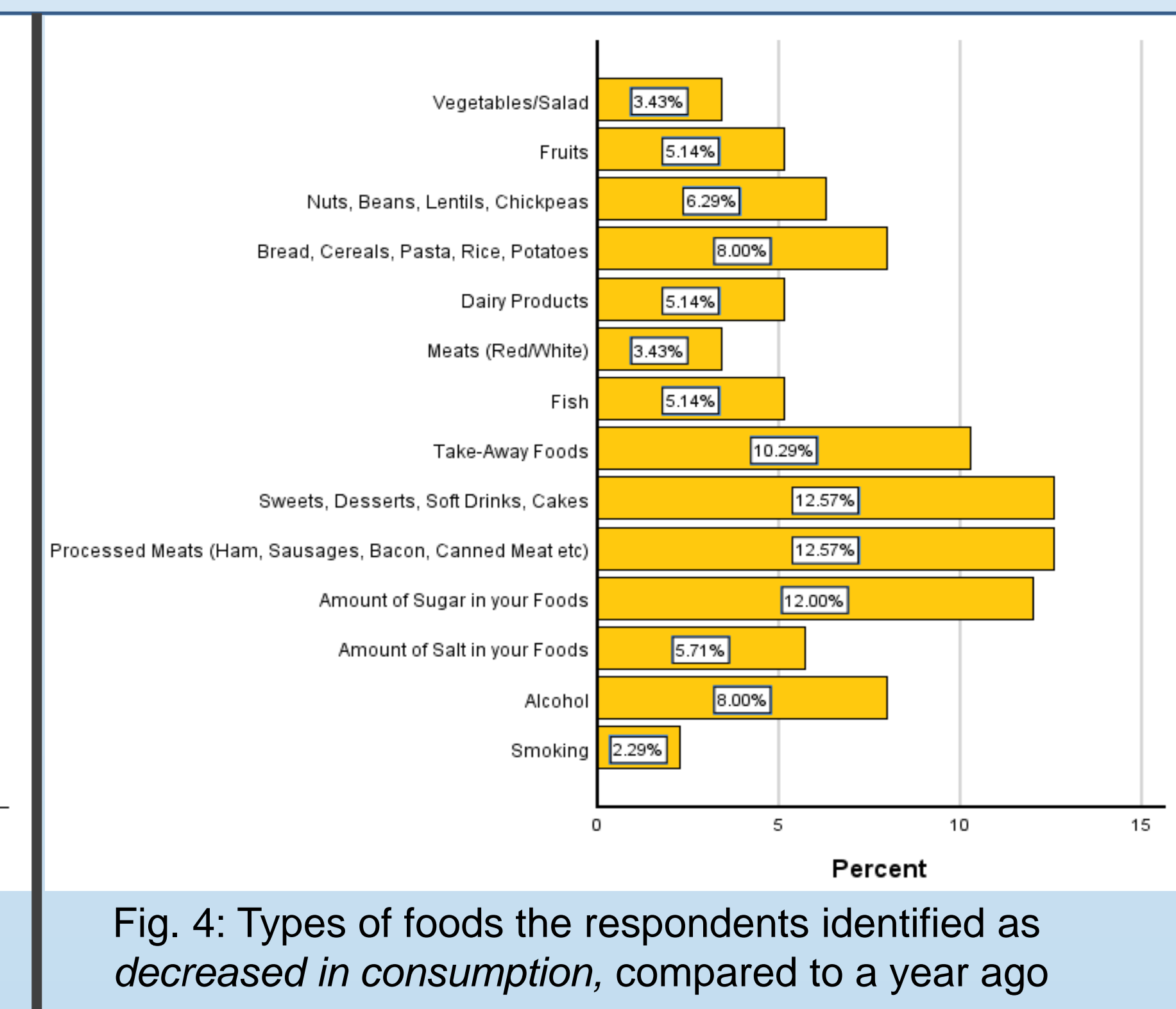


Fig. 4: Types of foods the respondents identified as decreased in consumption, compared to a year ago

## FINDINGS

- A total of 42 students responded to this survey
- According to **Fig. 1** 65% responses indicated that the respondents consumed healthy food options, such as, Fresh Vegetables/Salads, Fruits, Dairy Products, Meals Prepared from Raw Fresh Eggs/Fish/Chicken/Other Meats, on a regular basis (40% consumed *everyday* and 25% consumed *4-6 times a week*).
- According to **Fig. 2** 79% responses indicated that the respondents rarely consumed Ready to Eat Meals from Supermarkets, Take-Away Foods, Food from Coffee shops, Snack outlets, Mobile Food Outlets and/or Canteens, Snack Foods (Pies, Chips), Sweets (Chocolates/Ice Creams/Biscuits/Desserts/ Fizzy Drinks) (27% *never consumed*, 29% consumed *less often*, 23% consumed *once a week*).
- According to **Fig. 3** 70% of the responses indicated that the respondents had increased consumption of healthy food options, such as Vegetables/Salads, Fruits, Nuts/Beans/Lentils/Chickpeas, Bread/Cereals/Pasta/Rice/Potatoes, Dairy Products, Meats (Red/White) and Fish (14% Vegetables/Salads, 13% Fruits, 10% Nuts/Beans/Lentils/Chickpeas, 9% Bread/Cereals/Pasta/Rice/Potatoes, 4% Dairy Products, 8% Meats (Red/White) and 12% Fish).
- According to **Fig. 4** 63% of the responses indicated that the respondents had decreased consumption of unhealthy food options such as Take-Away Foods, Sweets/Desserts/Soft Drinks/Cakes, Processed Meats (Ham, Sausages, Bacon, Canned Meat etc.), Amount of sugar in foods, Amount of Salt in foods, Alcohol and Smoking (10.29% Take-Away Foods, 13% Sweets/Desserts/Soft Drinks/Cakes, 13% Processed Meats (Ham, Sausages, Bacon, Canned Meat etc.), 12% Amount of sugar in foods, 6% Amount of Salt in foods, 8% Alcohol and 2% Smoking).

## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The results of this study have highlighted how much the students care about their health and wellbeing. Given the likelihood for the students to adopt the habits they pick up at this stage in their life, and carry it on for the rest of their lives, (2) it is imperative that educational institutions provide dietary counselling facilities, along with planning and implementation of nutritional education programs, for its students

## REFERENCES

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- Tanton, J., Dodd, L. J., Woodfield, L., & Mabhala, M. (2015). Eating Behaviors of British University Students: A Cluster Analysis on a Neglected Issue. *Advances in Preventive Medicine*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2015/639239>
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## CONCLUSION

This project reflected the dietary habits of 42 tertiary level students at Wintec's Centre for Sport Science and Human Performance. In contrast to the literature, on dietary habits of tertiary level students, the respondents were found to be more health conscious, with majority of them being more inclined to choose healthy food options, such as, vegetables, fruits, dairy etc. and less inclined to select unhealthy food options, such as processed meats, alcohol, sweets, etc. in their diet.