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## Uni students: Baked beans and instant noodles not good enough

One in four University students struggle to afford healthy food and a large number report moderate to severe hunger, according to a new Australian study.

Researchers Danielle Gallegos and Kai Wen Ong surveyed 811 Brisbane-based university students on their household income, health and nutrition status, and access to food.

A quarter of the study participants experienced 'food insecurity' (difficulty accessing nutritious food) in the 12 months leading up to the survey, and six per cent reported to be repeatedly hungry.

Presenting her research at the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) National Conference in Melbourne this week, Dr Gallegos said financial difficulty was the main reason for poor access to nutritious food.

'Uni students are not the first group that come to mind when we think about food insecurity, but our study has highlighted that many find it hard to access nutritious foods. And around half of these students reported their household income before tax to be below \$600 a week,' said Dr Gallegos.

According to Dr Gallegos, cash-strapped students prioritise Uni fees, accommodation and bills – and discretionary expenses like food are often seen as less important.

'Two thirds of the food insecure students in our study ate less than two serves of fruit per week and four per cent had no fruit at all,' said Dr Gallegos, an Accredited Practising Dietitian.

She said vulnerable groups tend to eat more fast foods or energy-dense foods, like take-aways, as these are often viewed as more affordable and filling.

According to Dr Gallegos, low income groups who find it difficult to eat a healthy, balanced diet are more likely to be either overweight or underweight, and are at a greater risk of chronic diseases like diabetes, cancer and heart disease.

And eighty per cent of the food insecure students in the Queensland study reported their studies were compromised.

'There seems to be an acceptance out there that getting by on less nutritious food is a typical part of being a Uni student. But a diet of baked beans and instant noodles is not good enough when health and academic results are at stake. This culture is counterproductive to Australia becoming a 'smart' country,' said Dr Gallegos.

Dr Gallegos is calling for a review of Government support for tertiary students to help tackle poor nutrition in this group.

**For further information or to organise an interview contact Maree Garside,  
Dietitians Association of Australia on 0408 482 581.**

**Note to Editors:** The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) is the professional body representing dietitians nationally. Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) is the only national credential recognised by the Australian Government, Medicare, the Department of Veterans Affairs and most private health funds as the quality standard for nutrition and dietetics services in Australia. For more information visit [www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)

**Ends**

### Background

- The DAA National Conference is being held from May 27-29 at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre. For more information and program details, visit the conference link on the DAA website at [www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)