

Immigrants' new U.S. diets may be bad

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A University of Illinois study suggests coming to 'the land of milk and honey' can be hazardous to new immigrants' diets and health.

Ilana Redstone Akresh, visiting University of Pennsylvania professor of sociology, led the study analyzing changes in immigrants' diets after arriving in the United States and the subsequent relationship between those changes and their body mass index and health status.

She found 39 percent of her sample of 6,637 adults reported at least one significant change in their diet - most commonly increased consumption of junk food and meat.

More than 10 percent of the sample reported eating more junk food in the United States, while more than 8 percent said they ate more meat than they did in their home countries. Nearly 15 percent reported eating fewer vegetables, fruit, fish or rice and beans.

As a consequence, many immigrants are not only "bulking up," but also becoming less healthy, Akresh said.

The changes immigrants make may have short- and long-term health consequences, said Akresh. "Understanding these changes and examining their determinants is an important precursor to a fuller understanding of immigrant health."

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