

Abstract

Food addiction (FA) is defined as the overconsumption of highly palatable foods despite negative life consequences. Previous research on FA has yielded inconsistent results regarding prevalence across sex, racial, and weight categories. FA has shown to be associated with eating disorders (EDs) and substance use disorders (SUDs), though no study to date has examined associations between FA and early puberty. The current study used data from the Carolina C.A.R.E.S. study to explore the differences in demographic characteristics, early puberty, ED characteristics, and SUDs in a college sample. Logistic regression models were used to examine associations between FA and various factors. Our sample (n=784) had a FA prevalence of 5.4%. The only demographic characteristic associated with FA was sex, with females being more likely than males to have FA. Additionally, FA was significantly associated with several measures of EDs and SUDs. Individuals with FA were more likely to have higher levels of disordered eating symptoms, alcohol misuse, and drug use than those without FA. Our findings provide evidence that FA affects emerging adults and indicates a need for FA education and resources on college campuses.