

# Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on San Diego College Students Eating Habits and Physical Activity

Elizabeth Hansen, Sabrina Latanca, Sierra Lujan, Antonella Mantovani, Yasmine Padilla  
Department of Public Health, University of California San Diego  
B.S in Public Health

## Introduction

- ❖ The COVID-19 pandemic caused lockdowns of many industries resulting in increased sedentary behavior which has contributed to the US. obesity epidemic.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ Physical activity is an important factor for reducing the risk of obesity which is among the leading causes of death in the U.S.<sup>2</sup>

## Objective

To examine beliefs and perceptions of the COVID-19 pandemic on the eating habits and physical activity patterns among college students living in San Diego County.

- 📍 = Location of San Diego county schools used in survey
- From top to bottom: California State University San Marcos, University of California San Diego, San Diego State University, University of San Diego, Point Loma Nazarene University

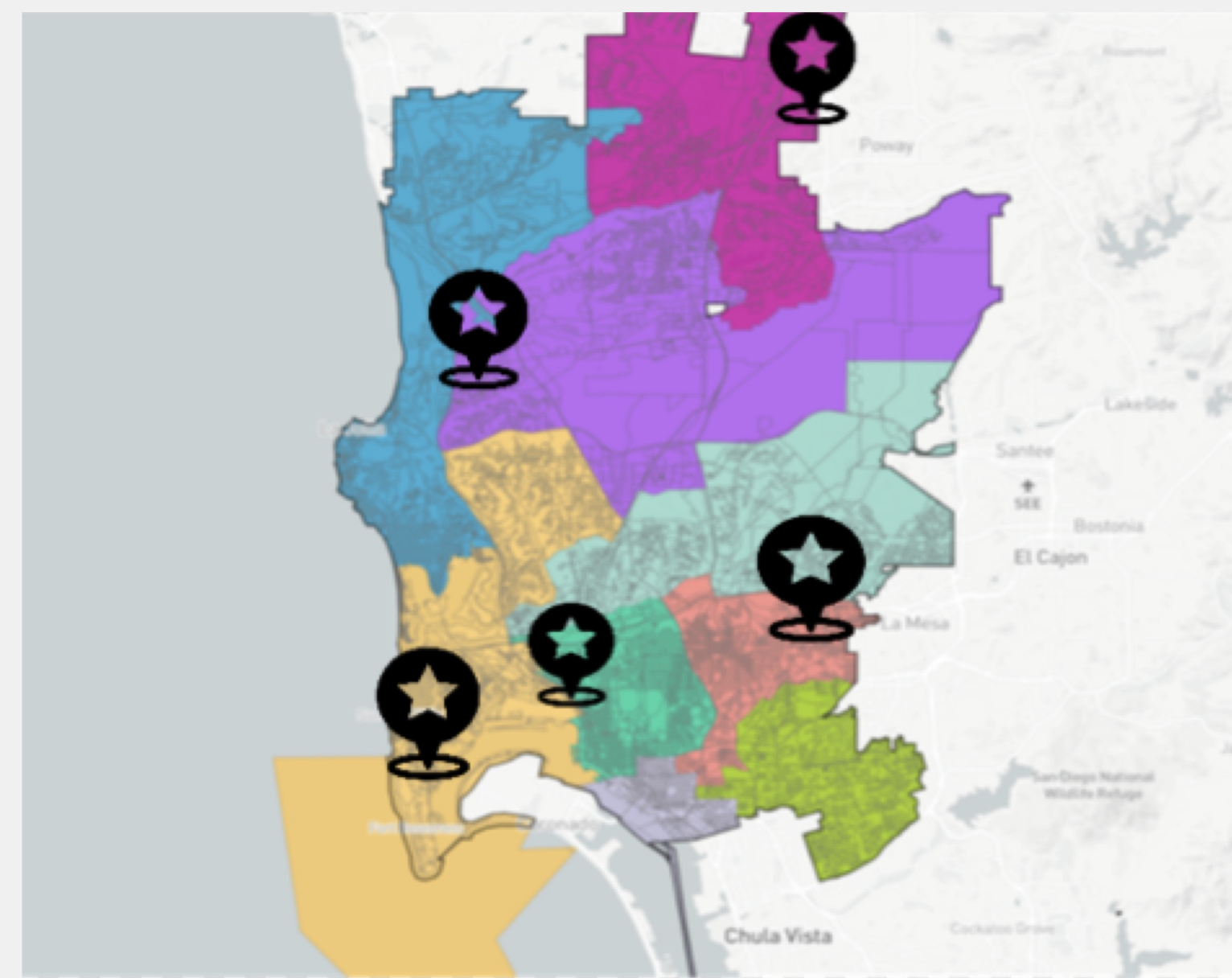


Figure 1. Map of San Diego showing different schools surveyed<sup>3</sup>

## Methods

- ❖ Between April and May 2022, a total of 86 college students between the ages of 18-23 participated in a cross-sectional study.
- ❖ Data was collected via google forms survey which was distributed on various social media platforms.
- ❖ The survey assessed perceptions of how the pandemic has altered eating habits, physical activity, and sedentary behaviors.

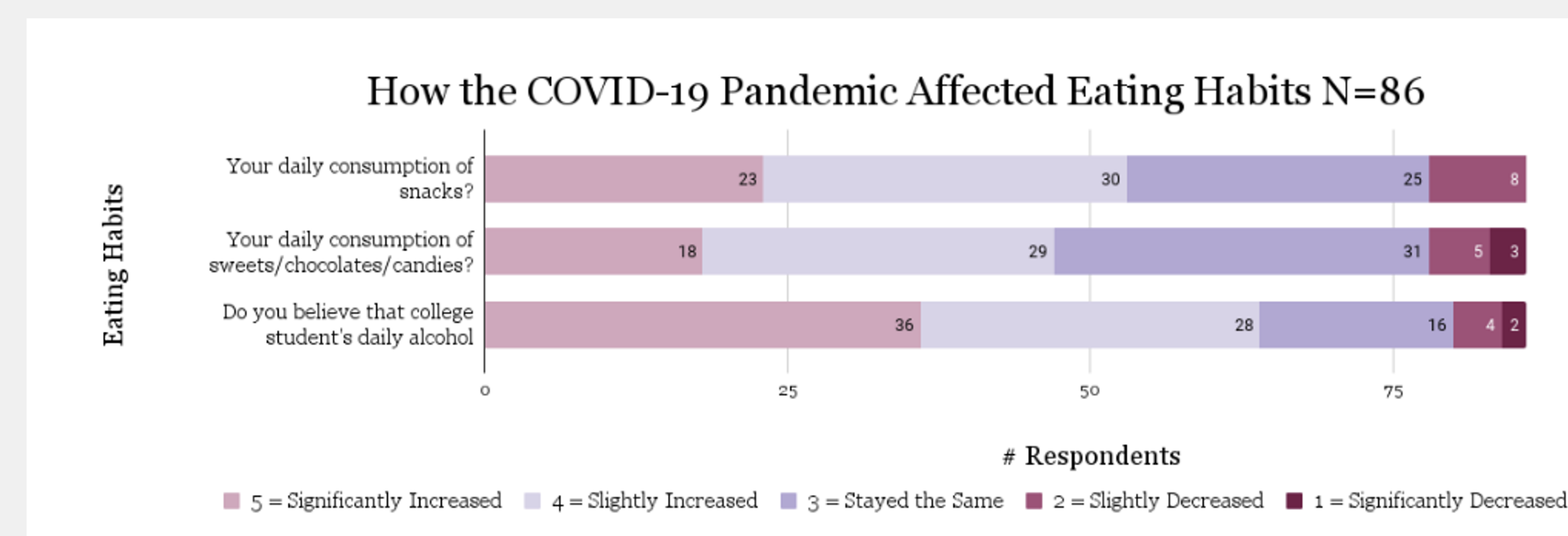
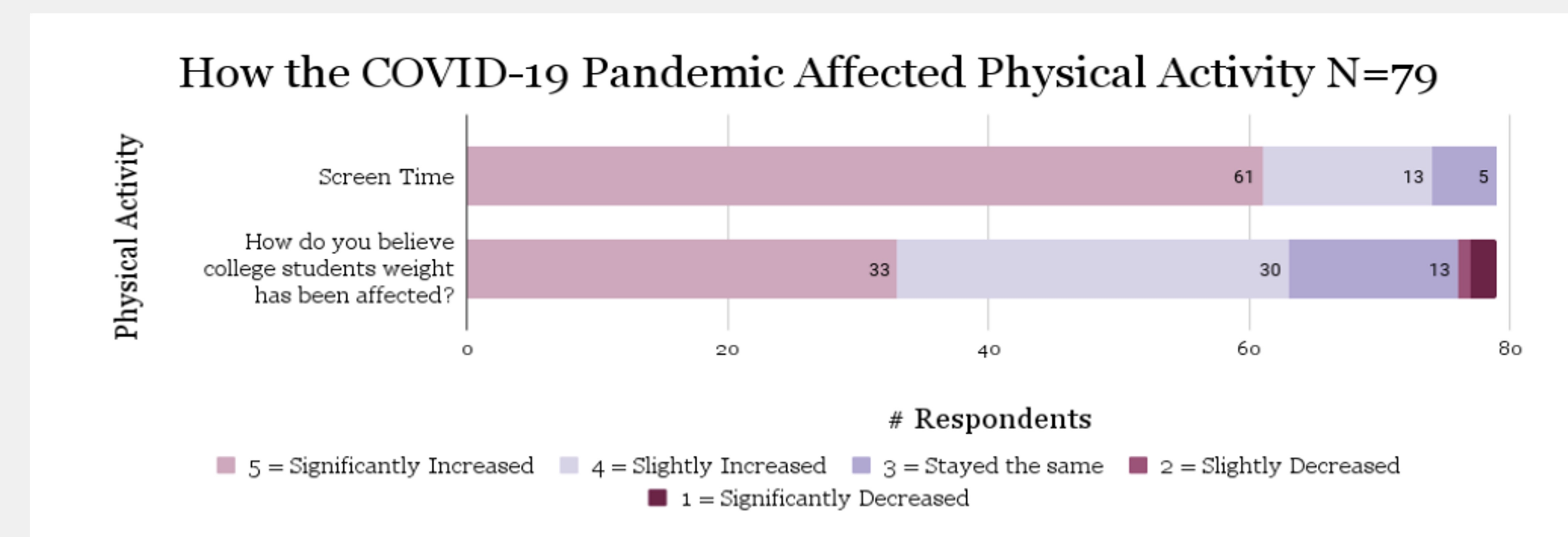
## Results

- ❖ Majority of participants identified as female (n=72), 50% were between the ages of 18-20, and 76% were enrolled at UCSD (see Table 1).
- ❖ 41% (n=36) of participants reported that they believe college students' alcohol consumption in general has increased
- ❖ 77.2% (n=61) of participants reported an increase in screen time.
- ❖ 41.8% (n=33) of participants reported that they believe college students' weight has significantly increased due to the pandemic.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variables	Percentage of Participants (N=86)	Variables	Percentage of Participants (N=86)
<b>Sex</b>		<b>School</b>	
Female	84% (n=72)	University of California San Diego	76% (n=65)
Male	14% (n=12)	San Diego State University	16% (n=14)
<b>Age</b>		California State University San Marcos	0.04% (n=3)
18-20	50% (n=43)	University of San Diego	0.00% (n=0)
21 – 23	42% (n=36)	Point Loma Nazarene University	0.03% (n=2)
24 or older	8% (n=6)	Other	0.03% (n=2)
<b>Race</b>		<b>Year in College</b>	
White	56% (n=48)	Freshman	0.09% (n=8)
Asian	26% (n=23)	Sophomore	24% (n=21)
Black/ African American	0.02% (n=2)	Junior	19% (n=17)
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.02% (n=2)	Senior	40% (n=34)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.04% (n=3)	Other	0.07% (n=6)
Other	0.09% (n=8)		

Figure 2. Survey Results: Reported Physical Activity and Eating Habits Affected by the Pandemic



## Conclusions

- ❖ Findings indicate that college students believe the pandemic has negatively affected college student's health by reducing the amount of physical activity and promoting unhealthy eating habits. These changes increase college students' risk factors for obesity



Figure 3: Student participating in virtual learning<sup>4</sup>

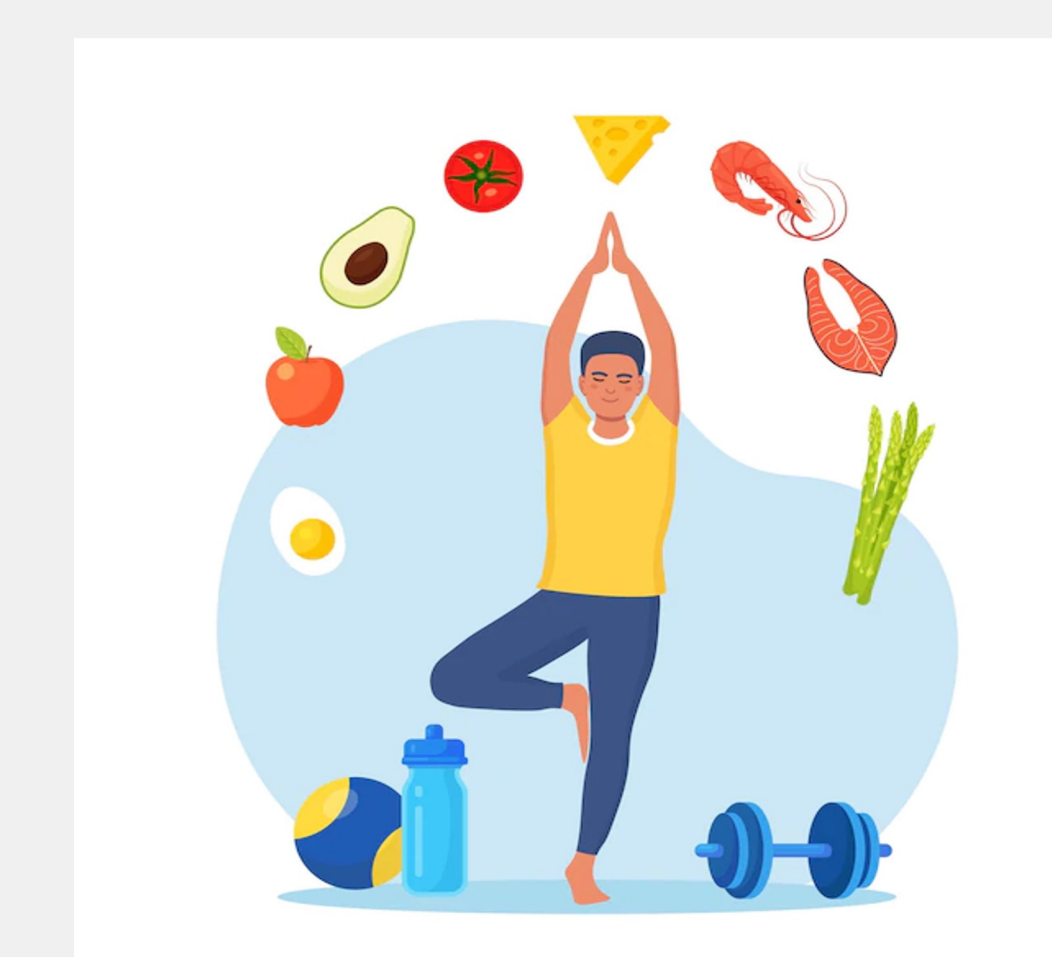


Figure 4: Person doing exercise and planning diet<sup>5</sup>

## Policy Implications

- ❖ Public health actions and interventions can be constructed to support these patterns so that college students can work around hybrid and/or remote learning and achieve healthier eating habits and physical activity patterns.

## References

- [1] Noguchi, Y. (2021, September 29). *Obesity rates rise during pandemic, fueled by stress, job loss, sedentary lifestyle*. NPR. Retrieved May 26, 2022,
- [2] Niemi, G. M., Rewane, A., & Algotar, A. M. (2021, June 8). *Exercise and fitness effect on obesity - NCBI bookshelf. Exercise and Fitness Effect On Obesity*. Retrieved May 26, 2022
- [3] Garrick, D. (2021, November 25). *New San diego boundary map boosts latino power, but more changes may be needed*. Tribune. Retrieved May 25, 2022
- [4] *Virtual Class. Student on computer. Online school*. (2021). Sustainable Business Toolkit. Retrieved May 25
- [5] *Diet plan: Man doing exercise and planning diet with fruit and vegetable. Guy doing yoga*. (n.d.). Shutterstock.