

# Nutrition and the Health of Young People

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## Benefits of Healthy Eating

- Healthy eating contributes to overall healthy growth and development, including healthy bones, skin, and energy levels; and a lowered risk of dental caries, eating disorders, constipation, malnutrition, and iron deficiency anemia.<sup>1</sup>

## Diet and Disease

- Early indicators of atherosclerosis, the most common cause of heart disease, begin as early as childhood and adolescence. Atherosclerosis is related to high blood cholesterol levels, which are associated with poor dietary habits.<sup>2</sup>
- Osteoporosis, a disease where bones become fragile and can break easily, is associated with inadequate intake of calcium.<sup>3</sup>
- Type 2 diabetes, formerly known as adult onset diabetes, has become increasingly prevalent among children and adolescents as rates of overweight and obesity rise.<sup>4</sup> A CDC study estimated that one in three American children born in 2000 will develop diabetes in their lifetime.<sup>5</sup>
- Overweight and obesity, influenced by poor diet and inactivity, are significantly associated with an increased risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, asthma, joint problems, and poor health status.<sup>6</sup>

## Obesity Among Youth

- The prevalence of obesity among children aged 6-11 years has more than doubled in the past 20 years and among adolescents aged 12-19 has more than tripled.<sup>7,8</sup>
- Overweight children and adolescents are more likely to become overweight or obese adults;<sup>9</sup> one study showed that children who became obese by age 8 were more severely obese as adults.<sup>10</sup>

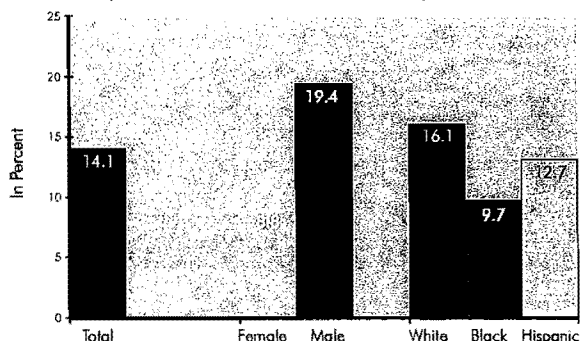
## Eating Behaviors of Young People

- Less than 40% of children and adolescents in the United States meet the U.S. dietary guidelines for saturated fat.<sup>11</sup>
- Almost 80% of high school students do not eat fruits and vegetables 5 or more times per day.<sup>12</sup>
- Only 39% of children ages 2-17 meet the USDA's dietary recommendation for fiber (found primarily in dried beans and peas, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains).<sup>13</sup>
- Almost 80% of adolescent females do not consume enough calcium.<sup>3</sup> During the last 25 years, consumption of milk, the largest source of calcium, has decreased 36% among adolescent females.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, from 1978 to 1998, average daily soft drink consumption almost doubled among adolescent females, increasing from 6 oz to 11 oz, and almost tripled among adolescent males, from 7 oz to 19 oz.<sup>11,15</sup>
- A large number of high school students use unhealthy methods to lose or maintain weight. A nationwide survey found that during the 30 days preceding the survey, 11.8% of students went without eating for 24 hours or more; 4.3% had vomited or taken laxatives in order to lose weight; and 5.9% had taken diet pills, powders, or liquids without a doctor's advice.<sup>12</sup>

## Diet and Academic Performance

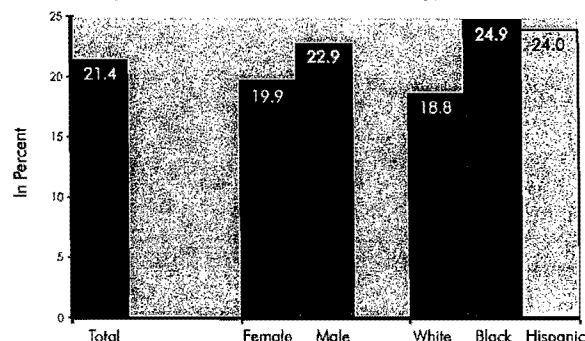
- Research suggests that not having breakfast can affect children's intellectual performance.<sup>16</sup>
- The percentage of young people who eat breakfast decreases with age; while 92% of children ages 6-11 eat breakfast, only 77% of adolescents ages 12-19 eat breakfast.<sup>11</sup>
- Hunger and food insufficiency in children are associated with poor behavioral and academic functioning.<sup>17, 18</sup>

Percentage of High School Students Who Drank  $\geq 3$  Glasses/Day of Milk,\* by Sex\*\* and Race/Ethnicity,\*\*\* 2007



\*During the 7 days preceding the survey; \*\*M>F; \*\*\*W>H>B  
Source: National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2005

Percentage of High School Students Who Ate Fruits and Vegetables  $\geq 5$  Times/Day,\* by Sex\*\* and Race/Ethnicity,\*\*\* 2007



\*100% fruit juice, fruit, green salad, potatoes (excluding French fries, fried potatoes, or potato chips) carrots, or other vegetables during the 7 days preceding the survey; \*\*M>F; and \*\*\*B, H>W  
Source: National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2005

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