

# Nutrition Facts

- Proper nutrition promotes the optimal growth and development of children.<sup>1</sup>
- Healthy eating helps prevent high cholesterol and high blood pressure and helps reduce the risk of developing chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes.<sup>1</sup>
- Healthy eating helps reduce one's risk for developing obesity, osteoporosis, iron deficiency, and dental caries (cavities).<sup>1,2</sup>
- Healthy eating is associated with reduced risk for many diseases, including several of the leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes.<sup>1</sup>
- Healthy eating in childhood and adolescence is important for proper growth and development and can prevent health problems such as obesity, dental caries, iron deficiency, and osteoporosis.<sup>1,2</sup>
- The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free and low-fat dairy products for persons aged 2 years and older. The guidelines also recommend that children, adolescents, and adults limit intake of solid fats (major sources of saturated and trans fatty acids), cholesterol, sodium, added sugars, and refined grains.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, most young people are not following the recommendations set forth in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.<sup>3-7</sup>
- Schools are in a unique position to promote healthy eating and help ensure appropriate food and nutrient intake among students. Schools provide students with opportunities to consume an array of foods and beverages throughout the school day and enable students to learn about and practice healthy eating behaviors. For example, as a healthy alternative to sugar-sweetened beverages, schools can provide students access to safe, free [drinking water](#).
- Schools should ensure that only nutritious and appealing foods and beverages are provided in school cafeterias, vending machines, snack bars, school stores, and other venues that offer food and beverages to students. In addition, nutrition education should be part of a comprehensive school health education curriculum.

## Nutrition and the Health of Young People

### Benefits of Healthy Eating

- Proper nutrition promotes the optimal growth and development of children.<sup>1</sup>
- Healthy eating helps prevent high cholesterol and high blood pressure and helps reduce the risk of developing chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes.<sup>1</sup>
- Healthy eating helps reduce one's risk for developing obesity, osteoporosis, iron deficiency, and dental caries (cavities).<sup>1,2</sup>

### Consequences of a Poor Diet

- A poor diet can lead to energy imbalance (e.g., eating more calories than one expends through physical activity) and can increase one's risk for overweight and obesity.<sup>1,8</sup>
- A poor diet can increase the risk for lung, esophageal, stomach, colorectal, and prostate cancers.<sup>9</sup>
- Individuals who eat fast food one or more times per week are at increased risk for weight gain, overweight, and obesity.<sup>1</sup>
- Drinking sugar-sweetened beverages can result in weight gain, overweight, and obesity.<sup>1</sup>
  - Providing [access to drinking water](#) gives students a healthy alternative to sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Hunger and *food insecurity* (i.e., reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns because a household lacks money and other resources for food) might increase the risk for lower dietary quality and undernutrition. In turn, undernutrition can negatively affect overall health, cognitive development, and school performance.<sup>10-12</sup>

## Eating Behaviors of Young People

- Most U.S. youth
  - Do not meet the recommendations for eating 2½ cups to 6½ cups\* of fruits and vegetables each day
  - Do not eat the minimum recommended amounts of whole grains (2–3 ounces\* each day)
  - Eat more than the recommended maximum daily intake of sodium (1,500–2,300 mg\* each day)<sup>1,3,7</sup>
- Empty calories from added sugars and solid fats contribute to 40% of daily calories for children and adolescents aged 2–18 years, affecting the overall quality of their diets. Approximately half of these empty calories come from six sources: soda, fruit drinks, dairy desserts, grain desserts, pizza, and whole milk.<sup>5</sup>
- Adolescents drink more full-calorie soda per day than milk. Males aged 12–19 years drink an average of 22 ounces of full-calorie soda per day, more than twice their intake of fluid milk (10 ounces), and females drink an average of 14 ounces of full-calorie soda and only 6 ounces of fluid milk.<sup>6</sup>


## Diet and Academic Performance

- Eating a healthy breakfast is associated with improved cognitive function (especially memory), reduced absenteeism, and improved mood.<sup>13-1</sup>

## Key Resources

- [School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity](#)
- [Competitive Foods in Schools](#)
- [Implementing Strong Nutrition Standards for Schools: Financial Implications](#)  [pdf 1.9M]
- [Making It Happen! School Nutrition Success Stories](#)
- [National Cancer Institute's Risk Factor Monitoring and Methods: Food Sources](#)  Data on U.S. dietary intake of the top food sources.
- [More Publications & Resources](#)

## References

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