

Child Nutrition Status in Texas

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

A HEALTHY DIET IS ESSENTIAL FOR TEXAS CHILDREN

Children need to follow healthy dietary patterns to grow and thrive. A healthy diet should contain nutrient-dense foods and beverages, including vegetables, fruits, beans/peas/lentils, dairy, lean meats and fish, and whole grains.¹

Healthy Eating in Texas School-age Children

On a given school day:



30% of Texas children did not eat any vegetables. These percentages vary by:

- Sex
 - **26%** in girls
 - **33%** in boys
- Grade level
 - **21%** in grade 2
 - **34%** in grade 4
 - **31%** in grade 8
 - **31%** in grade 11



31% of Texas children did not eat any whole fruit. These percentages vary by:

- Grade level
 - **19%** in grade 2
 - **27%** in grade 4
 - **36%** in grade 8
 - **42%** in grade 11



52% of Texas children did not eat whole grains. These percentages vary by:

- Sex
 - **49%** in girls
 - **54%** in boys

Why Healthy Diets Matter

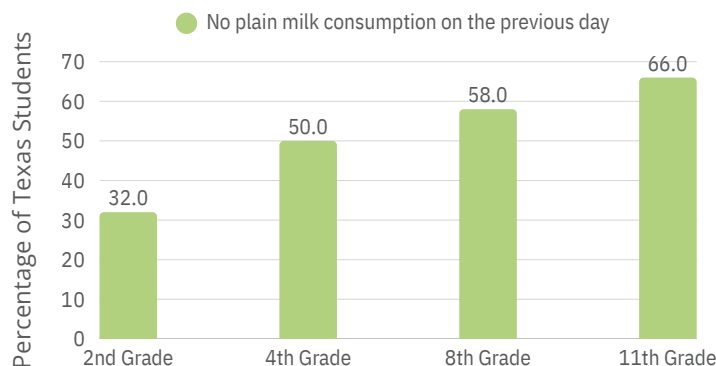
A healthy diet is associated with better physical, and psychological health for children and adolescents.¹⁻³

- Unhealthy dietary patterns are associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease risk factors.
- Healthy dietary patterns are associated with a lower risk of obesity and optimal growth and development.
- Children with healthy dietary patterns tend to have healthier dietary patterns during adulthood.



52% of Texas children did not drink plain milk on the previous day. These percentages vary by:

- Sex
 - **59%** in girls
 - **45%** in boys



Note: Any vegetables included legumes/beans. Whole grains included whole wheat, sprouted grain, oat, flax, high fiber.

How to improve Texas children's nutrition

Parents and family members play a key role in supporting children's healthy eating.⁴

- Offer nutrient-dense foods and beverages, such as fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Encourage drinking water instead of sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Limit foods and beverages with added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium.
- Encourage nutrient-dense snacks such as carrot sticks, hummus, and apple slices rather than candy and cookies.
- Limit TV and devices during meals and snack times.
- Encourage children to engage in grocery shopping, meal decisions, food preparation, and cooking.

Schools can promote student's healthy eating behaviors and improve dietary intake.⁵⁻⁶

- Offer nutrient-dense breakfast and lunch to all students.
- Offer more menu choices to improve food palatability and meet food preferences.
- Provide nutrition education in the classroom.
- Grow and maintain school gardens.

Federal programs that support children's nutrition.¹

1. School Breakfast & National School Lunch Program
2. Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
3. Summer Food Service Program (SUN Meals)
4. SNAP and WIC

Current Nutrition Guidelines

The 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommendations are:¹

- Follow a healthy dietary pattern at every life stage.
- Customize and enjoy nutrient-dense food and beverage choices to reflect personal preferences, cultural traditions, and budgetary considerations.
- Focus on meeting food group needs with nutrient-dense foods and beverages, and stay within calorie limits.
- Limit foods and beverages higher in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium, and limit alcoholic beverages.

3 key principles underlying the Dietary Guidelines:

- Meet nutritional needs primarily from foods and beverages.
- Choose a variety of options from each food group.
- Pay attention to portion size.

References

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About: Texas Child Health Status Report

These reports utilize state-level data from the Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition (Texas SPAN) Project 2021-2023 to provide an accurate representation of Texas child health.

Learn more at go.uth.edu/TexasChildHealth

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