

# Ultra-Processed Food Consumption by Texas Children

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

## TEXAS CHILDREN EAT A LOT OF ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

Ultra-processed foods (UPFs) are industrial foods and beverages that are high in added sugar, salt, fat, or other additives like food coloring to improve taste, convenience, and shelf life. Soda, chips, packaged snacks, breakfast cereal, chicken nuggets, and hotdogs are common types of UPFs.<sup>1,2</sup>

### UPF Consumption in Texas Children

On a given school day:



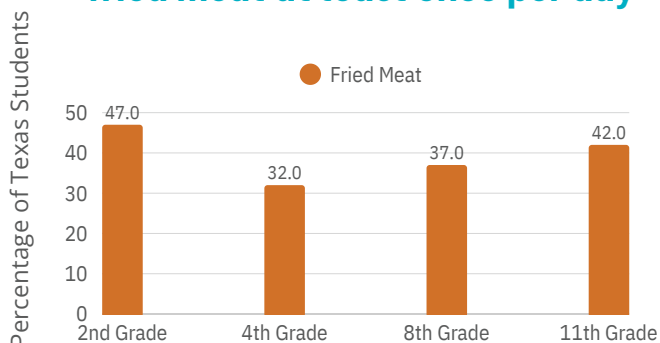
**78%** of school-aged children and adolescents in Texas consume at least one sugar-sweetened beverage.

- Sugar-sweetened beverages include regular sodas, coffee/tea with sugar, fruit-flavored drinks, flavored milk, and energy drinks.



**39%** of Texas children eat fried or processed meat (chicken, fish sticks, etc.) at least once a day.

#### Texas students who reported eating fried meat at least once per day



### Why Should Children Limit UPF Intake

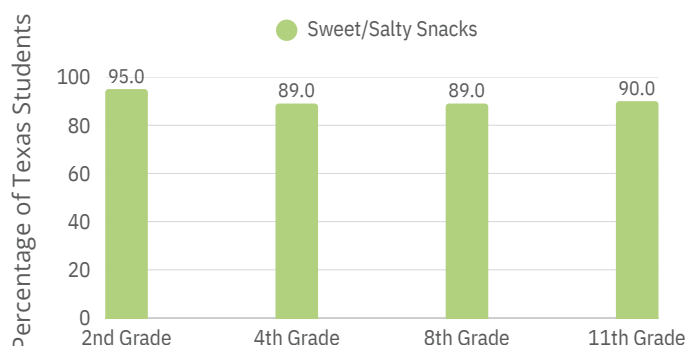
Among U.S. youth, over 60% of the total calories are from UPF. UPF intake is related to adverse health outcomes in children:<sup>3-5</sup>

- Higher risk for overweight and obesity
- Poor nutrition and overall diet quality
- Higher risk of mental health disorders
- Higher risk of asthma, wheezing, or other respiratory symptoms
- Higher risk of metabolic syndrome



**91%** of Texas children ate at least one sweet or savory snack (candy, frozen dessert, cakes, fries, or chips).

#### Texas students who reported eating sweet or salty snacks during the previous day



# How to improve Texas children's diets

## Parents and family members play a key role in supporting children's healthy eating.<sup>6</sup>

- 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, 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.<sup>7, 8</sup>

- 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.<sup>9-11</sup>

- National School Breakfast & Lunch Program
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
- Summer Food Service Program (SUN Meals)
- SNAP and WIC

## Use the **GO-SLOW-WHOA** list to make healthier choice. A healthy diet consists of mostly **GO** foods



**GO** foods are the least processed and are lowest in salt, added sugars, and unhealthy fats.

Examples: Fresh or frozen fruits with no sugar added, fresh or frozen vegetables, plain 1% milk, water



**SLOW** foods are in between GO and WHOA foods.

Examples: Fruit with sugar added, vegetable with added salt or fat.



**WHOA** foods are the most processed and are highest in unhealthy fats, added sugars and salt.

Examples: All sweet and savory snacks, such as cookies, candy, ice cream, chips, fried foods, soft drinks.

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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) 2021-2023 Project to provide an accurate representation of Texas child health.

Learn more at [go.uth.edu/TexasChildHealth](https://go.uth.edu/TexasChildHealth)

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