Healthy Children, Healthy State:

Eating Away from Home in Texas Children

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

TEXAS CHILDREN FREQUENTLY EAT AWAY FROM HOME

Compared to eating at home, eating away from home is associated with unhealthy dietary intake. The types of restaurants where children eat have an impact on overall diet quality and are associated with adverse health outcomes.[1,2]

Eating Away from Home Among Texas Children

71% of 2nd grade children in Texas ate at a restaurant in the past week.

4 in 10 children and adolescents eat at a restaurant at least 1 time on a school day:

- **42%** in 4th grade
- **41%** in 8th grade
- **46%** in 11th grade

Most students who eat at a restaurant also report eating fried foods at least 1 time at school day:

- **87%** in grade 2
- **83%** in grade 4
- **83%** in grade 8
- **85%** in grade 11

Most students who eat at a restaurant also report drinking sugar-sweetened beverages at least 1 time on a school day:

- **73%** in grade 2
- **89%** in grade 4
- **87%** in grade 8
- **88%** in grade 11

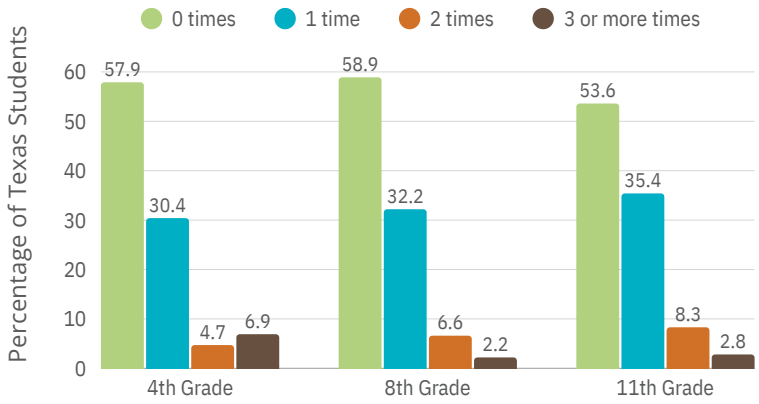
Note: Sugar-sweetened beverages include regular sodas, coffee/tea with sugar, fruit-flavored drinks, flavored milk, and energy drinks.

Why Eating at Home Is Important

Eating away from home is associated with:[1,2]

- Lower intake of vegetables and fruits
- Higher intake of ultra-processed and unhealthy foods such as, sugar-sweetened beverages, chips, chocolate, etc.
- Higher risk for overweight and obesity

Texas students who reported eating at a restaurant the previous day



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Texas SPAN Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey
Texas Health and Human Services | Texas Department of State Health Services

How to Support Children's Healthy Eating

Eating meals at home together is beneficial for both parents and children. Plan meals in advance and include children in meal planning, preparation, and cleanup. If eating at a restaurant, parents can: [3-6]

- Check the menu before going to the restaurant and plan to choose foods that are lower in saturated fat, sodium, added sugars, and calories.
- Be aware of the portion size. Share meals or save part of the meal for later. Choose water as a drink and avoid sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Choose foods that are grilled or baked rather than fried or breaded.
- Choose healthier sides such as vegetables, fruit, and salad with dressing that has limited added sugars, salt, and fat.

Policy recommendations to promote healthy beverage consumption: [7, 8]

- Make water or milk the default for kids meals.
- Support the use of recommended beverage types and portion sizes based on the nutrition guidelines for kids meals.
- Decrease marketing of sugary drinks and ultra-processed food to children.
- Provide nutrition education to parents and caregivers.
- Limit the distance of fast food restaurants from schools.

Current Nutrition Guidelines

The 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends limiting added sugars in food and beverages. [9]

- Children under 2 years: Avoid added sugars.
- Children age 2 or older: Added sugars should be less than 10% of calories which is equal to about 50 grams a day.

Healthy Eating Research has 3 key beverage consumption recommendations: [10]

- Beverages to **drink:** Plain drinking water and plain pasteurized milk.
- Beverages to **limit**: 100% juice, plant-based milk alternatives, and sweetened flavored milk.
- Beverages to **avoid**: Sugar-sweetened beverages, beverages with non-sugar sweeteners, and caffeinated beverages.

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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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