Texas children aren’t meeting nutrition guidelines

The USDA Dietary Guidelines\(^1\) recommends focusing on a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat dairy products, and high protein foods. They also recommend limiting added sugars and saturated fats and reducing sodium intake.

### Nutrition Crisis

On a given school day:
- Over 2.5 million (32%) of Texas children do not eat any vegetables.\(^2\)
- Over 1.5 million (19%) of Texas children do not eat fruit.\(^2\)
- 28% of 8th graders and 36% of 11th graders do not eat breakfast.\(^2\)
- Over 80% of Texas children eat at least one sweet or salty snack (candy, frozen dessert, cakes, french fries, or chips).\(^2\)

### Current and Lifetime Risks

- A healthy diet is associated with better physical, psychological, and social health.\(^3\)
- Skipping breakfast leads to overweight & obesity.\(^4\)
- Children who eat more fruits & vegetables have lower body weight.\(^5\)
- A high sugar, low fiber diet is related to lower creativity test scores.\(^6\)

Texas students who do not consume at least 5 servings of fruit & vegetables each day\(^2\):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd Grade</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th Grade</td>
<td>82.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>83.5%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### How we can improve Texas children’s nutrition

The USDA MyPlate illustrates the five food groups that are the building blocks for a healthy diet.\(^7\)

- Label food in school cafeterias, such as GO, SLOW, WHOA\(^8,9\)
- Ensure all school children have access to a healthy breakfast
- Implement a proven coordinated school health program, such as CATCH\(^10,11\)
- Limit unhealthy food & drink marketing to young children
- Ensure fast food kids meals default to healthy choices, such as milk or water instead of sugary drinks

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**Healthy Children, Healthy State:**

**CHILD NUTRITION IN TEXAS**

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living
The US Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Agriculture advise following a healthy eating pattern across the lifespan. Their 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends focusing on variety, nutrient density, and quantity, limiting calories from added sugars and saturated fats, reducing sodium intake, and shifting to healthier food and beverage choices.

A healthy eating pattern includes a variety of vegetables, fruits, grains (at least half of which are whole grains) fat-free or low-fat dairy, a variety of protein-rich foods, and oils. A healthy eating pattern limits saturated fats and trans fats, added sugars, and sodium.

References

2. School Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Project. Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living. SPAN project details available online at go.uth.edu/SPAN.


7. ChooseMyPlate.gov


9. CATCHInfo.org


About the Texas Child Health Status Report
This project is funded by the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation. These reports utilize state-level data from the School Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Project to provide an accurate representation of Texas child health.

Learn more at go.uth.edu/TexasChildHealth
Last Updated May 1, 2019