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Nutrition and the Health of Young People

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Diet and Disease

- Overweight and obesity, influenced by poor diet and inactivity, are significantly associated with an increased risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, asthma, joint problems, and poor health status.[1]
- Type 2 diabetes, formerly known as adult onset diabetes, has become increasingly prevalent among children and adolescents as rates of overweight and obesity rise.[2] A CDC study estimated that one in three American children born in 2000 will develop diabetes in their lifetime.[3]
- Overweight children and adolescents are more likely to become overweight or obese adults;[4] one study showed that children who became overweight by age 8 were more severely obese as adults.[5]
- Early indicators of atherosclerosis, the most common cause of heart disease, begin as early as childhood and adolescence. Atherosclerosis is related to high blood cholesterol levels, which are associated with poor dietary habits.[6]
- Osteoporosis, a disease where bones become fragile and can break easily, is associated with inadequate intake of calcium.[7]

Overweight Among Youth

- The prevalence of overweight among children aged 6-11 years has more than doubled in the past 20 years and among adolescents aged 12-19 has more than tripled.[8,9]

Overweight* Prevalence Among Children and Adolescents in the United States, 2003-2004[12]

Racial/Ethnic Group	Children (Ages 6 to 11)		Adolescents (Ages 12 to 19)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Black (Non-Hispanic)	17.5%	26.5%	18.5%	25.4%
Mexican American	25.3%	19.4%	18.3%	14.1%
White (Non-Hispanic)	18.5%	16.9%	19.1%	15.4%

** BMI at the 95th percentile or higher*[8]

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Diet and Academic Performance

- Research suggests that not having breakfast can affect children's intellectual performance.[11]
- The percentage of young people who eat breakfast decreases with age; while 92% of children ages 6-11 eat breakfast, only 75-78% of adolescents ages 12-19 eat breakfast.[10]

Eating Behaviors of Young People

- Less than 40% of children and adolescents in the United States meet the U.S. dietary guidelines for saturated fat.[10]
- Eighty percent of high school students do no eat fruits and vegetables 5 or more times per day.[9]
- Only 39% of children ages 2-17 meet the USDA's dietary recommendation for fiber (found primarily in dried beans and peas, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains).[13]
- Eighty-five percent of adolescent females do not consume enough calcium.[7] During the last 25 years, consumption of milk, the largest source of calcium, has decreased 36% among adolescent females.[14] Additionally, from 1978 to1998, average daily soft drink consumption almost doubled among adolescent females, increasing from 6 oz to 11 oz, and almost tripled among adolescent males, from 7 oz to 19 oz.[15,10]
- A large number of high school students use unhealthy methods to lose or maintain weight. A nationwide survey found that during the 30 days preceding the survey 12.3% of students went without eating for 24 hours or more; 4.5% had vomited or taken laxatives; and 6.3% had taken diet pills, powders, or liquids without a doctor's advice.[9]

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