



Health Behaviour in School-aged Children: Healthy Settings for Young People in Canada (2006)

Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) is a World Health Organization survey examining the health behaviours of youth recently conducted in 41 countries. This fact sheet highlights information about the health of 9,672 Canadian youth in grades 6 through 10 in the HBSC study funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada.

For more information about the HBSC study and for Canada-specific data, please visit www.publichealth.gc.ca. For international data visit the HBSC global site at www.hbsc.org.

Healthy Living and Healthy Weight Among Canadian Youth

As many as one in five young people in Canada have trouble maintaining a healthy weight, and research shows that patterns developed in childhood can last a lifetime. Being overweight can lead to higher risks for chronic diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers, as well as other significant health problems.

The good news is that children can learn healthy habits, and research shows that getting active and eating a healthy, nutritious diet can help young people maintain a healthy weight for life.

choose to take part in activities and social groups they enjoy. This underlines the need to maintain an atmosphere of fun around physical activity.

Majority do not eat fruits or vegetables daily

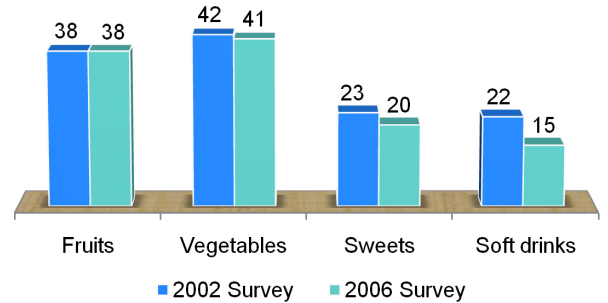
Canada's Food Guide recommends that young people eat between six and eight servings of fruits and vegetables per day. However, the majority of students report eating less than one serving per day. These numbers are largely unchanged since 2002.

Almost half of students in Grades 6 to 10 are physically inactive

Between 56 and 64 percent of boys, and 39 to 56 percent of girls report being physically active for 60 minutes a day at least five days per week. For both boys and girls, levels of activity tend to decline as they reach the higher grades. Encouragingly, there was an increase in physical activity levels in 2006 compared to 2002, with 54 percent of students being active, compared to 49 percent in 2002.

Research has shown that children are not motivated by health benefits; they tend to

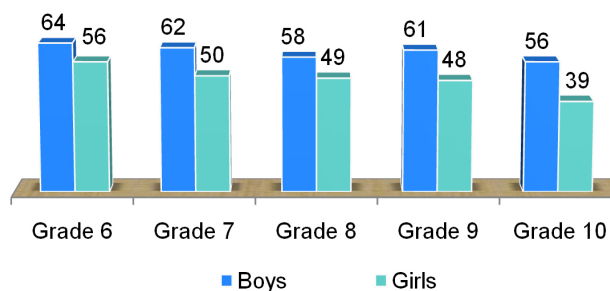
Eating fruits, vegetables, sweets, and non-diet soft drinks once or more per day (%)



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At the same time, both boys and girls report eating fewer sweets and drinking fewer non-diet soft drinks. This reduction has coincided with the widespread introduction of healthy eating policies in schools across the country.

Students physically active 5 days or more over a typical week for a total of at least 60 minutes per day (%)



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TVs and computers take up a lot of young people's time

More than 60 percent of students report watching two or more hours of television per day. Grade 8 boys had the highest scores, at 71 percent. About one-half of boys and one-third of girls report playing

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video games for two or more hours per day on average, and as many as 60 percent of students reported two or more hours of daily computer use outside school.

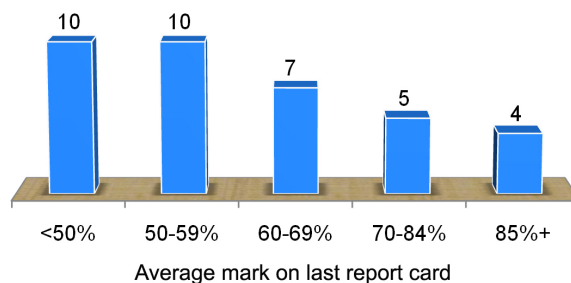
These kinds of sedentary activities mean young people have less time to be physically active, and may not be getting the benefits they need to support their optimal growth and development.

Academic achievement is linked to healthy weight

Students who succeed academically in school also tend to be more physically active. Among the highest academic achievers, 57 percent report being active for at least 60 minutes a day, five days a week. Among the lowest academic achievers, the proportion was 40 percent.

Students with the highest marks were also less likely to be obese compared to those with the lowest marks.

Students who are obese and academic achievement (%)



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Family affluence makes a difference

Young people from more affluent families are more likely to be physically active and to make healthy food choices. For example, 41 percent of students with a high family affluence score report eating fruits at least once per day, compared to 31 percent for students with low family affluence scores. Generally, young people with higher family affluence are also more likely to be physically active for at least 60 minutes a day, five days a week – and less likely to be obese.

These findings point to a need to consider socio-economic status in efforts to support young people to adopt healthier behaviours.

What can schools, families and communities do?

Everyone can help make a difference by contributing to healthy, supportive learning environments. Research consistently demonstrates that health and education are inextricably linked – and the most effective way to address issues such as maintaining a healthy weight, is through a comprehensive school health approach.

This means not looking at any one issue affecting youth in isolation, but recognizing that many factors are interconnected with healthy living. For example, research has shown correlations between students' weight and academic achievement¹ (HBCS 2006), while other research shows correlations between weight and television viewing habits². When you look across the spectrum of factors affecting youth, it is clear that families, teachers, administrators, school staff, professionals and other community members all have a role to play.

Schools that take a comprehensive approach recognize this, and engage parents and community members as partners in supporting healthy development. They also incorporate policies and practices that support healthy lifestyles – including all aspects of students' health and general well-being – into every aspect of the school environment.

For more information on comprehensive school health as well as tools and resources that support physical activity and good nutrition in schools, visit the Joint Consortium for School Health website at www.jcsh-cces.ca.

For more about what's happening in your community, contact your local school or district directly.

¹ Boyce, W. (ed.). *Healthy settings for young people in Canada*. Public Health Agency of Canada: Ottawa, ON; 2008

² Tremblay, M.S., Willms, J.D. Is the Canadian childhood obesity epidemic related to physical inactivity? 2003. *International Journal of Obesity*, 27, 1100-1105.