

# Healthy Eating

Eating healthy can help reduce people’s risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis, and several types of cancer, as well as help them maintain a healthy body weight.<sup>183</sup> As described in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, eating healthy means consuming a variety of nutritious foods and beverages, especially vegetables, fruits, low and fat-free dairy products, and whole grains; limiting intake of saturated fats, added sugars, and sodium; keeping trans fat intake as low as possible; and balancing caloric intake with calories burned to manage body weight.<sup>184</sup> Safe eating means ensuring that food is free from harmful contaminants, such as bacteria and viruses.<sup>185</sup>

## KEY FACTS

- Fewer than 15 percent of adults and 10 percent of adolescents eat recommended amounts of fruit and vegetables each day.<sup>186</sup>
- Sixty-three percent of adults and 84 percent of adolescents consume at least one sugar-sweetened beverage (e.g., soda, sport drinks, fruit drinks and punches, low-calorie drinks, sweetened tea) each day.<sup>187</sup>
- Most American adults consume more than twice the recommended average daily sodium intake level.<sup>188</sup> Nearly 80 percent of sodium consumed comes from packaged, processed, and restaurant foods.<sup>189</sup>
- Over two-thirds of the adult population is overweight or obese. Approximately one in five children are overweight or obese by the time they reach their sixth birthday and over half of obese children become overweight at or before age two.<sup>190</sup>
- Over 23 million people, including 6.5 million children, live in “food deserts” – neighborhoods that lack access to stores where affordable, healthy food is readily available (e.g., full-service supermarkets, grocery stores). These communities commonly have an abundance of fast food restaurants and convenience stores that offer foods high in calories but low in nutritional value.<sup>191</sup>
- Low-income women are more likely than their higher-income counterparts to return to work earlier after childbirth and to be engaged in jobs that make it challenging for them to breastfeed.<sup>192</sup> Babies who are breastfed may be less likely to become obese.<sup>193</sup>
- Almost 15 percent of households (50 million people) experience food insecurity at least occasionally during the year, meaning that their access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources.<sup>194</sup> Individuals and families that experience food insecurity may be more likely to be overweight or obese, potentially because the relative lower cost of junk foods (i.e., foods low in nutrients but high in calories) can promote over-consumption of calories.<sup>195</sup>
- Each year, roughly 1 in 6 Americans (48 million people) get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die of foodborne diseases. Reducing foodborne illness by 10 percent would keep about 5 million Americans from getting sick each year.<sup>196</sup>

## Recommendations: What can be done?

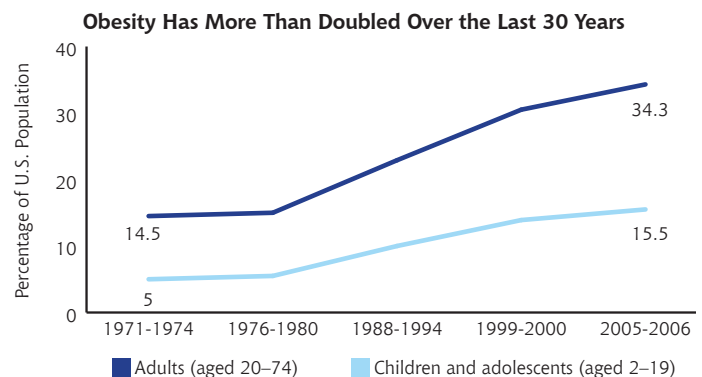
Healthy eating is influenced by access to healthy, safe, and affordable foods, as well as by individuals’ knowledge, attitudes, and culture. Communities can support healthy eating and make healthy options affordable and accessible, and people can be provided with the information and tools they need to make healthy food choices.

### 1 Increase access to healthy and affordable foods in communities.

Increasing access to healthy, affordable food options provides people with the opportunity to make healthy choices.<sup>197</sup> Providing healthy foods in existing establishments, increasing the availability of full-service supermarkets and grocery stores, and supporting local and regional farm-to-table efforts (e.g., farmers markets, community gardens) have all been shown to increase access to healthy food.<sup>198</sup> In addition, providing a greater variety of healthy options that are affordable can help increase consumption of healthy foods, as the price of healthy food choices is frequently more expensive (per calorie) than less healthy food options.<sup>199</sup>

### 2 Implement organizational and programmatic nutrition standards and policies.

Nutrition standards and policies (e.g., food procurement policies) that align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans increase access to healthy food and beverages and limit access to less healthy foods.<sup>200</sup> Such policies can be implemented in work sites, schools, early learning centers, institutional cafeterias/food service, hospitals, and living facilities



Source: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey I and II, CDC, 1984-2008  
\*Age-adjusted by the direct method to the year 2000 U.S. Bureau of the Census estimates using the age groups 20-39, 40-59, and 60-74 years.

for older adults, as well as within Federal and state-supported food services and programs.<sup>201</sup> Such policies not only help people make healthier food choices, but over time will lead to a wider variety of healthier products from which to choose.<sup>202</sup>

**3 Improve nutritional quality of the food supply.** Manufacturers and retailers (e.g., stores, restaurants) have a key role in producing and serving healthy food options. Processed and prepared foods, such as packaged, restaurant (both sit-down and fast food), and convenience foods often contain high amounts of calories, sodium, added sugars, and saturated and trans fat.<sup>203</sup> Providing appropriate portion sizes helps people limit calorie intake, particularly when eating high-calorie foods.<sup>204</sup>

**4 Help people recognize and make healthy food and beverage choices.** People are better able to make healthy decisions when provided with the information and motivation to identify and make healthy choices.<sup>205</sup> Easy-to-understand nutrition information at the point of purchase can help people make healthier food choices.<sup>206</sup> Strengthening individuals' ability to prepare and cook healthy foods at home can help them make healthy meals and improve their overall nutrition.<sup>207</sup> Providing people with the knowledge and tools to balance their caloric intake and output can help them achieve and maintain a healthy weight.<sup>208</sup> The media can support healthy decision making by promoting healthier food choices and limiting the marketing of unhealthy food to children.<sup>209</sup>

**5 Support policies and programs that promote breastfeeding.** For nearly all infants, breastfeeding is the best source of nutrition and immunologic protection, and also provides health benefits to mothers (e.g., faster weight loss, reduced risk of breast and ovarian cancers).<sup>210</sup> Institutional changes in maternity care practices (e.g., helping mothers initiate breastfeeding within one hour of birth, referring mothers to breastfeeding support groups) increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates. Support is important to help new mothers establish and continue breastfeeding as they return to work or school. Lactation policies that provide private space and flexible scheduling and that offer lactation management

services and support (e.g., breastfeeding peer support programs) can make it easier for a mother to breastfeed.<sup>211</sup>

**6 Enhance food safety.** Proper food handling, preparation, and storage, as well as adoption of hand washing practices within commercial establishments and homes, help reduce contamination and prevent foodborne illness.<sup>212</sup> Procedures to monitor, detect, and control contamination when it occurs are essential to protecting our nation's food supply.<sup>213</sup>

### Food Safety Working Group

The President's Food Safety Working Group aims to modernize food safety through collaborative partnerships with consumers, industry, and regulatory partners. The website [FoodSafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov) (<http://www.foodsafety.gov>) provides consumers with information and tools they need to stay healthy, including information on food recalls and alerts.

## Actions

### The Federal Government will

- Work to ensure that foods purchased, distributed, or served in Federal programs and settings meet standards consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- Improve agricultural policies to better align with the nutrition goals of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- Strengthen the nation's comprehensive food safety system.
- Develop voluntary guidelines for food marketed to children and monitor and report on industry activities.
- Support initiatives to increase the availability of healthy and affordable foods in underserved urban, rural, and frontier communities.
- Implement the menu labeling provisions of the Affordable Care Act to help provide consistent facts about food choices in chain restaurants.
- Provide information, tools, and expertise to help Americans understand and apply the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (e.g., MyPlate).
- Support breastfeeding, including implementing the breastfeeding provisions in the Affordable Care Act.

Key Indicators	Current	10-Year Target
Proportion of adults and children and adolescents who are obese	Adults: 34.0%	30.6%
	Children and Adolescents: 16.2%	14.6%
Average daily sodium consumption in the population	3,641 mg	2,300 mg
Average number of infections caused by salmonella species transmitted commonly through food	15.2 cases per 100,000 population	11.4 cases per 100,000 population
Proportion of infants who are breastfed exclusively through 6 months	14.1%	25.5%

# Healthy Eating

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Healthy Food Financing Initiatives

Twenty-three and a half million Americans, including 6.5 million children, live in identified food deserts. Of those, 11.5 million live in low-income urban and rural communities where the closest supermarket is more than one mile from their homes. In response to this issue, the Departments of Treasury, Agriculture, and Health and Human Services have coordinated an approach that encourages the construction of healthy food retail outlets and other projects that make healthy food available in high poverty communities. The projects increase access to healthy foods, as well as small business and employment opportunities.

- Implement programs and regulations to increase access to healthy food and eliminate food insecurity (e.g., Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, USDA Healthier U.S. School Challenge).
- Improve and expand the use of existing food and nutrition systems to track changes in eating patterns and conduct research to identify effective approaches.

### *Partners Can:*

#### State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Governments can

- Ensure that foods served or sold in government facilities and government-funded programs and institutions (e.g., schools, prisons, juvenile correctional facilities) meet nutrition standards consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- Strengthen licensing standards for early learning centers to include nutritional requirements for foods and beverages served.
- Work with hospitals, early learning centers, health care providers, and community-based organizations to implement breastfeeding policies and programs.
- Ensure laboratories, businesses, health care, and community partners are prepared to respond to outbreaks of foodborne disease.
- Use grants, zoning regulations, and other incentives to attract full-service grocery stores, supermarkets, and farmers markets to underserved neighborhoods, and use zoning codes and disincentives to discourage a disproportionately high availability of unhealthy foods, especially around schools.

#### Businesses and Employers can

- Increase the availability of healthy food (e.g., through procurement policies, healthy meeting policies, farm-to-work programs, farmers markets).
- Adopt lactation policies that provide space and break time for breastfeeding employees (in accordance with the Affordable Care Act) and offer lactation management services and support (e.g., breastfeeding peer support programs).
- Provide nutrition information to customers (e.g., on menus), make healthy options and appropriate portion sizes the default, and limit marketing of unhealthy food to children and youth.
- Reduce sodium, saturated fats, and added sugars and eliminate artificial trans fats from products.
- Implement proper handling, preparation, and storage practices to increase food safety.

#### Health Care Systems, Insurers, and Clinicians can

- Use maternity care practices that empower new mothers to breastfeed, such as the Baby-Friendly Hospital standards.
- Screen for obesity by measuring body mass index and deliver appropriate care according to clinical practice guidelines for obesity.
- Assess dietary patterns (both quality and quantity of food consumed), provide nutrition education and counseling, and refer people to community resources (e.g., Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); Head Start; County Extension Services; and nutrition programs for older Americans).

#### Early Learning Centers, Schools, Colleges, and Universities can

- Implement and enforce policies that increase the availability of healthy foods, including in a la carte lines, school stores, vending machines, and fundraisers.
- Update cafeteria equipment (e.g., remove deep fryers, add salad bars) to support provision of healthier foods.
- Eliminate high-calorie, low-nutrition drinks from vending machines, cafeterias, and school stores and provide greater access to water.
- Implement policies restricting the marketing of unhealthy foods.
- Provide nutrition education.

#### Community, Non-Profit, and Faith-based Organizations can

- Lead or convene city, county, and regional food policy councils to assess local community needs and expand programs (e.g., community gardens, farmers markets) that bring healthy foods, especially locally grown fruits and vegetables, to schools, businesses, and communities.
- Implement culturally and linguistically appropriate social supports for breastfeeding, such as marketing campaigns and breastfeeding peer support programs.

#### Individuals and Families can

- Eat less by avoiding oversized portions, make half of the plate fruits and vegetables, make at least half of the grains whole grains, switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk, choose foods with less sodium, and drink water instead of sugary drinks.
- Balance intake and expenditure of calories to manage body weight.

- Breastfeed their babies exclusively for the first 6 months after birth when able.
- Prevent foodborne illness by following key safety practices—clean (wash hands and surfaces often), separate (do not cross-contaminate), cook (cook food to proper temperatures), and chill (refrigerate promptly).

## KEY DOCUMENTS

- The Surgeon General’s Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation
- The White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report to the President
- The Surgeon General’s Call to Action on Breastfeeding
- The Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPlate

### PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Let’s Move!

Let’s Move! is a comprehensive initiative dedicated to solving the problem of obesity within a generation. Let’s Move! has sparked national awareness and attention among all sectors of the nation. This past year, groundbreaking legislation ensuring all children have healthier food in school was passed; Walmart announced a Nutrition Charter to bring healthier and more affordable foods to their stores; national sports leagues are operating clinics across the nation to encourage children to be physically active for 60 minutes a day; and Let’s Move! has also released new public service announcements to help parents make healthier food choices and be more physically active with their families. More than 500 communities across the nation have signed up to be a Let’s Move! city or town committed to improving the health of their residents.

