

NUTRITION AMONG VIRGINIA MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

RESULTS FROM THE VIRGINIA YOUTH SURVEY – 2015

INTRODUCTION

Healthy eating contributes to growth and development of children and adolescents.¹ Choosing nutritious foods helps prevent high cholesterol and high blood pressure, and helps reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer.² Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend healthy eating patterns, rich in fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat dairy products. The guidelines recommend limiting added sugar, sodium, and saturated and *trans* fats.² Poor eating patterns can affect health, cognitive development and school performance.³ Healthy students are better learners. Eating breakfast is associated with improved memory, reduced absenteeism, and improved mood.³ The CDC recommends that schools implement policies and programs that support healthy food environments, and provide students with learning opportunities that encourage healthy nutrition.³

RESPONDENTS

A total of 2246 Virginia middle school students took the survey, most of whom (90%) were between the ages of 11 and 13 years old. Males (51%) and females (49%), as well as student grade levels were evenly distributed.

SUMMARY

Breakfast

- Seven percent of students did not eat breakfast on any of the previous 7 days.
- Females were less likely than males to eat breakfast on all of the previous 7 days (0.7 times as likely).
- Students who ate breakfast on all of the previous 7 days were more likely to receive As and Bs in school (1.6 times as likely) (**fig. 1**).
- Students who ate breakfast on all of the previous 7 days were less likely to perceive themselves as slightly or very overweight (0.7 times as likely) and to skip school without permission (0.6 times as likely) (**fig. 1**).

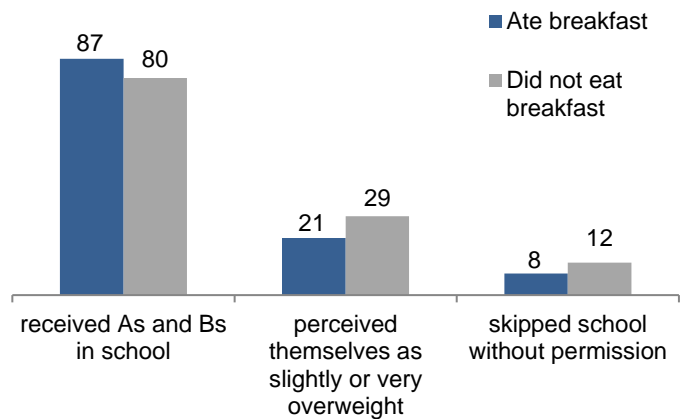


Figure 1: Percentage of students who received As and Bs in school, who perceived themselves as slightly or very overweight, and who skipped school without permission, by whether they ate breakfast on all of the previous 7 days.

Soda

- Sixteen percent of students drank soda (Coke, Pepsi, or Sprite) at least once per day during the previous 7 days.
- Six percent of students drank soda (Coke, Pepsi, or Sprite) 3 or more times per day during the previous 7 days.

Fruits & Vegetables

- Seventeen percent of students consumed vegetables 3 or more times per day.
- Thirty-seven percent of students ate fruit or drank 100% fruit juice 2 or more times per day.
- Students who ate dinner with their parents 4 or more times during the previous 7 days were more likely to eat vegetables 3 or more times per day (1.2 times as likely) (fig. 2).

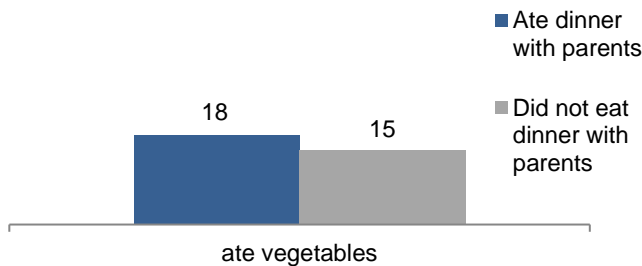


Figure 2: Percentage of students who ate vegetables 3 or more times per day, by whether they ate dinner with their parents 4 or more time during the previous 7 days.

Dinner with Parents

- Seventy-nine percent of students ate dinner at home with their parents 4 or more times during the previous 7 days.
- Students who ate dinner at home with their parents 4 or more times during the previous 7 days were more likely to receive As and Bs in school (1.8 times as likely) and were less likely to perceive themselves as slightly or very overweight (0.8 times as likely) or to have ever felt sad, hopeless, or anxious (0.8 times as likely).

Hunger

- Four percent of students went hungry most of the time or always because there was not enough food in their home.
- Students who went hungry most of the time or always because there was not enough food in their home were more likely to have ever felt sad, hopeless, or anxious (1.9 times as likely) and were less likely to receive As and Bs in school (0.3 times as likely) (fig. 3).

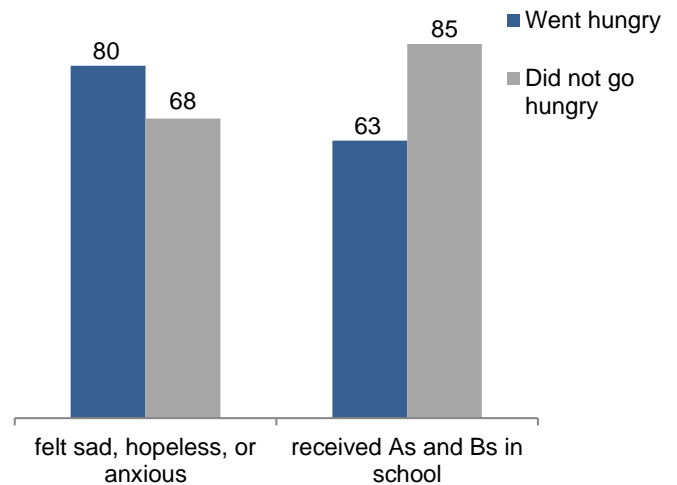


Figure 3: Percentage of students who felt sad, hopeless, or anxious and who received As and Bs in school, by whether they went hungry most of the time or always.

MORE INFORMATION

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. September 2011. School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/npao/pdf/mmwr-school-health-guidelines.pdf>
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. 8th Edition. December 2015. Retrieved from: <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/>
3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. June 2014. Health and Academic Achievement. Retrieved from: https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/health_and_academic_s/pdf/health-academic-achievement.pdf

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