

Poor Nutrition

CDC works to reduce the four main risk factors for preventable chronic diseases: tobacco use, poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, and excessive alcohol use.

Good nutrition is essential for keeping Americans healthy across the lifespan. A healthy diet helps children grow and develop properly and reduces their risk of chronic diseases, including obesity. Adults who eat a healthy diet live longer and have a lower risk of obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers. Healthy eating can help people with chronic diseases manage these conditions and prevent complications.

Most Americans, however, do not have a healthy diet. Although breastfeeding is the ideal source of nutrition for infants, only 1 in 4 is exclusively breastfed through 6 months of age as recommended. Fewer than 1 in 10 adults and adolescents eat enough fruits and vegetables, and 9 in 10 Americans aged 2 years or older consume more than the recommended amount of sodium.

In addition, 6 in 10 young people aged 2 to 19 years and 5 in 10 adults consume a sugary drink on a given day. Processed foods and sugary drinks add unneeded sodium, saturated fats, and sugar to many diets, increasing the risk of chronic diseases.

CDC supports breastfeeding and healthier food and drink choices in settings such as early care and education facilities, schools, worksites, and communities.

The Harmful Effects of Poor Nutrition

Overweight and Obesity

Eating a healthy diet, along with getting enough physical activity and sleep, can help children grow up healthy and prevent overweight and obesity. In the United States, 19% of young people aged 2 to 19 years and 40% of adults have obesity, which can put them at risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers. In addition, obesity costs the US health care system \$147 billion a year.

In the United States:



3 IN 4 INFANTS
are not exclusively
breastfed for 6 months.

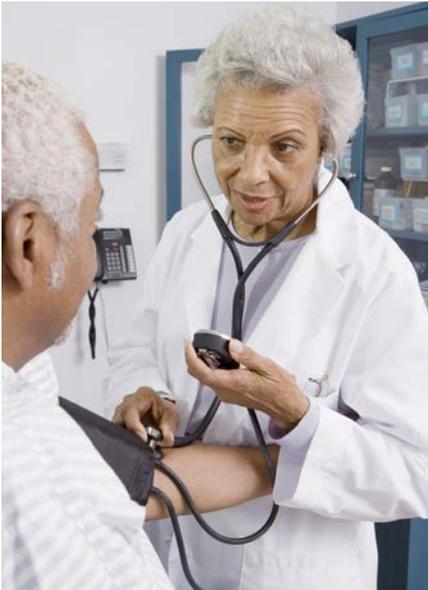


9 IN 10 AMERICANS
consume too much sodium.



\$147 BILLION
a year is spent on health
care for obesity.





Heart Disease and Stroke

Two of the leading causes of heart disease and stroke are high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol. Consuming too much sodium can increase [blood pressure](#) and the risk for [heart disease](#) and [stroke](#). Current guidelines recommend getting less than 2,300 mg a day, but Americans consume more than 3,400 mg a day on average.

Over 70% of the sodium that Americans eat comes from packaged, processed, store-bought, and restaurant foods. Eating foods low in saturated fats and high in fiber and increasing access to low-sodium foods, along with regular physical activity, can help prevent high blood cholesterol and high blood pressure.

Type 2 Diabetes

People who are overweight or have obesity are at increased risk of type 2 diabetes compared to those at a normal weight because, over time, their bodies become less able to use the insulin they make. Of US adults, 88 million—more than 1 in 3—have [prediabetes](#), and more than 8 in 10 of them don't know they have it. Although incidence has decreased in recent years, the number of adults with diagnosed diabetes has nearly doubled in the last 2 decades as the US population has increased, aged, and become more overweight.



Cancer

An unhealthy diet can increase the risk of some cancers. Overweight and obesity are associated with at least 13 types of cancer, including endometrial (uterine) cancer, breast cancer in postmenopausal women, and colorectal cancer. These cancers make up 40% of all cancers diagnosed.

Deficits in Brain Function

The brain develops most quickly in the first 1,000 days of life, from the start of pregnancy to the child's second birthday. Having low levels of iron during pregnancy and early childhood is associated with mental and behavioral delays in children. Ensuring that iodine levels are high enough during pregnancy also helps a growing baby have the best brain development possible.



CDC's Work to Promote Good Nutrition

Data Systems That Measure Breastfeeding Practices and Eating Habits

CDC's [Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity](#) uses national and state surveys to track [breastfeeding rates](#) and the [eating habits](#) of Americans, including fruit, vegetable, and added sugar consumption. The division also reports data on [nutrition policies and practices](#) for each state. [Data](#) from these surveys are used to understand trends in nutrition and

differences between population groups. CDC partners use this information to create environments that support breastfeeding and encourage healthy eating habits where people live, learn, work, and play, especially for populations at highest risk of chronic disease.

Breastfeeding Support in the Hospital and Community

Breastfeeding is the best source of nutrition for most infants. It can reduce the risk of some short-term health conditions for infants and long-term health conditions for infants and mothers. Maternity care practices in the first hours and days after birth can influence whether and how long infants are breastfed.

CDC funds programs that help hospitals use [maternity care practices that support breastfeeding](#). These programs have helped increase the percentage of infants born in hospitals that use these practices from 1.7% in 2007 to 26.1% (about 1 million infants) in 2018. CDC also works with partners to support programs designed to improve continuity of care and community support for breastfeeding mothers.

Healthier Food Options in Early Care and Education Facilities and Schools

About 60 million US children spend time in early care and education facilities or schools. These settings can directly influence what children eat and drink and how active they are—and build a foundation for healthy habits.

CDC is helping our nation's children grow up healthy and strong by:

- Creating resources to help partners improve obesity prevention programs and use nutrition standards.
- Investing in training and learning networks that help child care providers and state and local child care leaders meet standards and use and share best [practices](#).
- Providing technical assistance, such as training school staff how to buy, prepare, and serve fruits and vegetables or teach children how to grow and prepare fruits and vegetables.

The [CDC Healthy Schools](#) program works with states, school systems, communities, and national partners to promote [good nutrition](#). These efforts include publishing guidelines and tips on how schools and parents can model healthy behaviors and offer healthier school meals, [smart snacks](#), and water access.

CDC also works with national groups to increase the number of [salad bars](#) in schools. As of 2018, the Salad Bars to School program has delivered over 5,000 salad bars to schools across the nation, giving over 2.7 million children and school staff better access to fruits and vegetables.





Healthier Food Options in the Workplace

Millions of Americans buy foods and drinks while at work. CDC develops and promotes [food service guidelines](#) that encourage employers and vendors to [increase healthy food options](#) for employees. Grantees are working to make healthy foods and drinks (including water) more available in cafeterias, snack shops, and vending machines. CDC also partners with states to help employers comply with the federal lactation accommodation law and provide breastfeeding mothers with places to pump and store breast milk, flexible work hours, and maternity leave benefits.

CDC's [Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention](#) manages the [Sodium Reduction in Communities Program](#), which funds eight sites across the country to help schools, hospitals, and worksites offer low-sodium options in the foods they serve and sell. Reducing sodium intake to 2,300 mg a day could save 280,000 to 500,000 lives and nearly \$100 billion in health care costs over the next 10 years.



Improved Access to Healthy Foods in States and Communities

Some Americans in low-income urban neighborhoods, rural areas, and tribal communities have little access to healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, that are also affordable. CDC's [State Physical Activity and Nutrition Program](#), [High Obesity Program](#), and [Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health](#) program fund states and communities to improve food systems in these areas through food hubs, [local stores](#), farmers' markets, and bodegas.

These programs, which also involve food vendors and distributors, help improve the variety and number of healthier foods and drinks available and help promote and market these items to customers.



Lifestyle Change Programs to Reduce Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes Risk

CDC's [Childhood Obesity Research Demonstration](#) projects bring together researchers and community organizations to improve screening for obesity and deliver affordable lifestyle change programs to children with obesity. These family-centered programs located in Federally Qualified Health Centers, clinics, or community venues can improve children's dietary habits, weight, and health, reducing their risk of chronic diseases.

CDC's [National Diabetes Prevention Program](#) (National DPP) is a partnership of public and private organizations working to deliver an affordable, evidence-based lifestyle change program to help people with prediabetes prevent or delay type 2 diabetes. Participants in the National DPP learn to make healthy food choices, be more physically active, and find ways to cope with problems and stress. These lifestyle changes can cut their risk of developing type 2 diabetes by as much as 58% (71% for those over 60).