



NCHS Nutrition Data

About NCHS

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) is the nation's principal health statistics agency, providing data to identify and address health issues. NCHS compiles statistical information to help guide public health and health policy decisions.

Collaborating with other public and private health partners, NCHS uses a variety of data collection mechanisms to obtain accurate information from multiple sources. This process provides a broad perspective to help understand the population's health, influences on health, and health outcomes.

Nutrition data

For more than 45 years, the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), a major program of NCHS, has collected comprehensive information about health and nutrition, including dietary intakes. NHANES is an ongoing survey of the U.S. population that combines home interviews with standardized physical examinations and laboratory tests conducted in a mobile examination center (MEC). NHANES obtains nationally representative data on body measurements such as height and weight, body composition, biomarkers of nutritional status, and dietary intake and behaviors.

NHANES dietary data are collected using a 24-hour dietary recall. At the MEC, participants describe all foods and beverages consumed on the preceding day as part of the dietary interview. Participants also answer questions on consumption of fish and seafood in the past 30 days. A second recall is obtained over the telephone 3–10 days later. Data on dietary supplements use in the past month are collected at the home interview and again during the 24-hour recalls.

Federal agencies, researchers, health care providers, and policymakers use these data to assess and monitor the nutritional intake and status of the U.S. population and to inform nutrition policy and programs.

Overweight and weight control behaviors

NHANES data (height, weight, sex, and age) allow researchers to estimate and track prevalence of overweight and obesity, as well as describe weight-loss behaviors in the United States.

Obesity among adults and youth

- During 2015–2016, 18.5% (13.7 million) of U.S. youth aged 2–19 years and 39.8% (93.3 million) of adults had obesity. The age-adjusted prevalence of obesity increased among adults from 33.7% in 2007–2008 to 39.6% in 2015–2016. The prevalence of obesity did not change significantly among youth (16.8% and 18.5%) over this period.

Weight-loss practices among adults

- During 2013–2016, nearly one-half of U.S. adults (49.1%) tried to lose weight in the last 12 months. A greater percentage of women (56.4%) than men (41.7%) tried to lose weight. The most commonly reported methods to lose weight were exercising (62.9%) and eating less (62.9%), followed by consuming more fruit, vegetables, or salads (50.4%).

Dietary intake and behavior

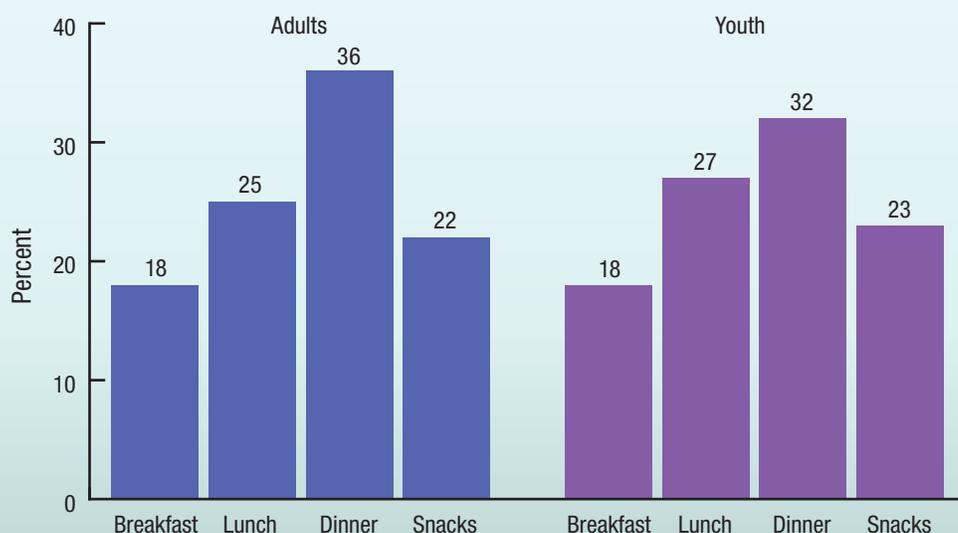
NHANES data on dietary intake (food, beverages, and dietary supplements) are used to describe meal patterns and food and nutrient intakes among the U.S. population, and among specific age, sex, and race-ethnicity groups. Select recent findings based on these data are described below.

Meal patterns of adults and youth

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are traditionally considered the three main meals of the day. NHANES data for 2015–2016 show that breakfast was the smallest and dinner the largest meal of the day in terms of their contribution to total calories consumed on a given day, for both adults and youth.

- Snacks contributed almost one-quarter of total calories consumed by Americans (22% for adults and 23% for children).

Figure 1. Percentage of calories from breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks on a given day among adults aged 20 and over and youth aged 2–19 years: United States, 2015–2016



NOTE: Data are based on dietary interviews of a nationally representative sample of the civilian noninstitutionalized population.

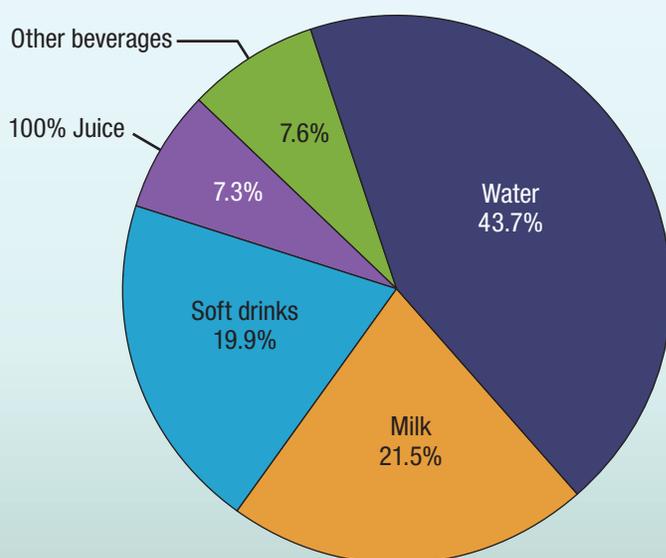
SOURCE: NCHS, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2015–2016.

Seafood consumption among adults and youth

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend consuming two servings of seafood, including fish and shellfish, per week. Consuming seafood is associated with various benefits for brain and heart health as well as reduced inflammation.

- During 2013–2016, 20.1% of adults and 5.6% of youth consumed seafood at least two times per week. More non-Hispanic Asian adults and youth consumed seafood compared with other groups (non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black,

Figure 2. Contribution of beverage types to total beverage consumption among youth aged 2–19 years: United States, 2013–2016



NOTES: Percentages are based on total grams of reported intake. Other beverages include coffee, tea, sports and energy drinks, and other miscellaneous beverages.

SOURCE: NCHS, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2013–2016.

and Hispanic). A decreasing trend between 2005–2006 and 2015–2016 was noted for both adults and youth consuming seafood at least two times per week, from 26.0% to 19.2% among adults and from 8.3% to 5.4% among youth.

Fast food consumption among adults

Fast food is a part of the American diet and has been associated with high caloric intake and poor diet quality. During the NHANES dietary interview, participants also report where they obtained each food and beverage item they consumed in the 24-hour recall period. Fast food consumption was defined based on food source reported as “restaurant fast food/pizza.”

- During 2013–2016, approximately 37% of adults consumed fast food on a given day.

Beverage consumption among youth

Beverages are an important source of hydration and affect total caloric intake. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that water, fat-free and low-fat milk, and 100% juice be the primary beverages consumed.

- Dietary recall data from NHANES 2013–2016 show that water (43.7%) and milk (21.5%) accounted for close to two-thirds of total beverage intake by youth aged 2–19 years. Soft drinks accounted for about one-fifth (19.9%), followed by 100% juice (7.3%) and other beverages (7.6%).