

Obesity has reached epidemic proportions. In the past 20 years, the prevalence of obesity has increased by more than 60 percent among adults and tripled in children and adolescents. Approximately 16 percent of children and adolescents are overweight²⁷ and more than half of these children have at least one cardiovascular disease risk factor such as elevated cholesterol and hypertension.²⁸ Type 2 diabetes has become increasingly prevalent among children and adolescents.²⁷ This disease has traditionally been found in the adult population.

Developing healthy eating behaviors is necessary for adolescents to improve their health status. Nutrition education is critical so adolescents understand the importance of a balanced diet containing calcium and other nutrients rather than sugary drinks and high-fat snacks. Nationally, 78 percent of the adolescents reported eating fewer than five fruits and vegetables per day.⁹

- Americans currently consume about 33 percent of their total calories from fat.²⁹
- Overweight adolescents often become overweight adults with an increased risk for a wide variety of poor health outcomes including diabetes, stroke, heart disease, arthritis and certain cancers.³⁰
- Because lifetime dietary patterns are established during youth, adolescents should be encouraged to choose nutritious foods and to develop healthy eating habits.³¹
- Studies have shown high rates of body dissatisfaction and dieting among adolescent females, with many engaging in unhealthy weight control behaviors such as fasting and self-induced vomiting. Overemphasis on thinness during adolescence may contribute to eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Adolescent females represent a high-risk population for the development of these two health problems and comprise 90 percent to 95 percent of all patients with eating disorders.³²

HP 2010 Objectives:

19-03: Reduce the proportion of children and adolescents who are overweight or obese to no more than 5 percent.