

# HEALTHY PEOPLE 2020

## CRITICAL INDICATORS FOR ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS



### Proportion of Adolescents and Young Adults Who Are Obese.

#### Overview

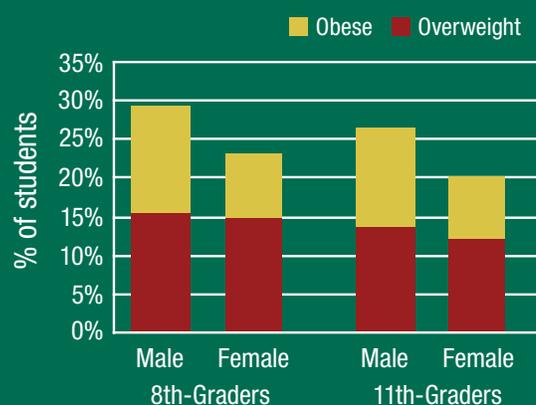
The Nutrition and Weight Status Critical Indicator for adolescents (aged 12-19) and young adults (aged 20-24) reflects scientific evidence supporting the benefits of maintaining a healthy body weight. The related objectives also emphasize that efforts to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight should address individual behaviors, as well as the policies and environments that support these behaviors in settings such as schools, colleges, worksites, health care organizations, and communities. Go to [www.healthypeople.gov](http://www.healthypeople.gov) to find a list of the objectives related to healthy weight.

#### Why is weight status important for young people?

Experts agree that being healthy and fit in adulthood is largely determined by the communities that we live in as young people. Instituting public policies and structures that ensure clean air, increase opportunities for an active lifestyle, and ensure convenient and affordable access to nutritious foods will save money and lives in the long run. By promoting healthy environments, we support individuals and communities to be healthy. In addition, we may be able to impact health-related outcomes, such as academic success, and ensure a stronger and healthier workforce.

Adolescence is a time of immense physical growth and development — second only to infancy. Ensuring young people have easy access to safe and nutritious foods and adequate physical activity is critical to support the development of their brains and bodies. Young people who maintain a healthy weight, eat nutritious foods and get plenty of physical activity tend to have higher self-esteem, less incidence of depression and do better in school.<sup>1,2</sup>

Weight status by gender among 8th and 11th Grade students in Oregon



## Where we are now

Recent National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) data show that rates of child and adolescent obesity may be stabilizing among certain groups after a long period of sharp increase.<sup>3</sup> Nationally, 34 percent of youth aged 12-19 are considered overweight, and 18 percent are obese. In Oregon, 26.6 percent of eighth-graders and 23.6 percent of 11th-graders are considered overweight or obese.<sup>4</sup>

There are still persistent disparities in weight status across racial and ethnic groups. Data show that Hispanic boys and non-Hispanic black girls are more likely to be overweight than their non-Hispanic white peers.<sup>3</sup>

## Policymakers

Public infrastructures, such as adequate public transportation, safe and walkable neighborhoods, access to markets with healthy foods and schools that embrace health as vital to academic success, all contribute to helping adolescents and young adults become healthy, productive citizens.

Policymakers can support the implementation of school wellness policies, ensure that schools implement food marketing restrictions and enforce nutrition standards for foods that are sold on school grounds. Go to [www.oregonactionforhealthykids.org](http://www.oregonactionforhealthykids.org) for information on school wellness policies, nutrition and physical education in Oregon.

Policymakers can also promote community development that encourages walking and biking, and attract grocery stores to underserved areas through financial and regulatory incentives.<sup>5</sup>

## Community settings

Where we live, work, play and learn is one of the most important things determining whether we end up fit and healthy or not. When people do not have access to a healthy and safe environment or opportunities to make healthier choices, they have poorer health and a lower quality of life. Environments that are critical to adolescents and young adults include K-12 schools, colleges, worksites and neighborhoods.

Quality health education, school meals and opportunities for physical activity in K-12 schools support students who are healthy and ready to learn. Colleges and worksites can institute wellness policies that create standards for food sold on campus and encourage physical activity.

“Policy and environmental approaches that make healthy choices available, affordable, and easy can be used to extend the reach of strategies designed to raise awareness and support people who would like to make healthy lifestyle changes.”

~ Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention

Farm to School programs, the School Garden Program, and Community Garden programs are ways to encourage eating more fruits and vegetables and teach youth about how food gets on their plates. Go to [www.farmtoschool.org/state-home.php?id=47](http://www.farmtoschool.org/state-home.php?id=47) for information on Farm to School programs and the School Garden Program in Oregon.

## Parents and guardians

Parents and guardians have tremendous influence on young people's food behaviors and activity levels. For example, eating meals together as a family is associated with positive effects on young people across many areas of life, including the development of healthy eating behaviors<sup>6</sup> and the maintenance of healthy weight status.<sup>7</sup> Food made at home is usually more nutritious than food that is not.<sup>8</sup> Limiting “screen time” (such as television and computers) is one way to encourage healthy lifestyles and limit sedentary activity, as well as limit exposure to advertising of unhealthy foods. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that young people should not have a television in their bedrooms.<sup>9</sup>

## Individuals and peers

A young person's thoughts and feelings about his or her own weight is an important factor in future weight status.<sup>10</sup> Peers strongly influence what young people eat and what kind of activities they engage in, as well as how they feel about their weight status. Weight is the primary reason students are bullied in school. Go to [www.yaleruddcenter.org](http://www.yaleruddcenter.org) for information on strategies to end weight bias and stop bullying.

Strategies young people can use to maintain a healthy weight include limiting sugar-sweetened beverages (such as soda and energy drinks), being active for 60 minutes a day and eating more fruits and vegetables. Adult role models (such as parents and guardians, teachers, mentors and coaches) can help young people by modeling healthy eating habits.

**For more information on this brief,  
go to [www.healthoregon.org/ah](http://www.healthoregon.org/ah)**

## Health Care Providers

Bright Futures — comprehensive health supervision guidelines endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics — recommend that as part of a comprehensive well-visit physicians should:

- Evaluate body satisfaction and practices used to maintain weight. Encourage parents to support nutrition by keeping a variety of foods, such as colorful vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy and lean meats, at home.
- Encourage family meals and eating breakfast.
- Assess levels of physical activity and promote 60 minutes of physical activity on most days.

Go to [www.brightfutures.aap.org](http://www.brightfutures.aap.org) for more information.



## References

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