Achieving healthy weights

Overweight and obesity in childhood and adolescence have been associated with negative social and economic outcomes, elevated health risks and morbidities, and increased mortality rates in adulthood. [1]

Key findings

New Brunswick children and youth continue to demonstrate obesity rates that are among the highest in Canada. The higher percentage of high birth weight babies (babies weighing 4,500 g or more at birth) in New Brunswick compared to Canada implies an early basis for child obesity. With few exceptions (like screen time), a slow improvement is demonstrated in the area of healthy eating and physical activity.

The fact that obesity rates have not shown similar improvement either means that the changes in the determinants will translate into healthier weights on the long term, or that there are other factors that contribute to the obesity rates among children and youth in New Brunswick.
Obesity rates

Overweight and obesity are risk factors for a large number of chronic health conditions like high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and stroke.\(^2\)

- Rates of overweight and obesity among children and youth have stabilized over the past few years.
- Close to 3 in 10 youth and more than 3 in 10 children in N.B. are overweight or obese.
- Aboriginal children have higher obesity rates compared to the overall child population.
- New Brunswick is the third worst province for reported rates of overweight and obesity among youth.
- In Canada, approximately 33% of obese preschool-aged children and 50% of obese school-aged children remain obese as adults.

High birth weight

Young adults who were born with high birth weight have an increased prevalence of obesity.\(^3\)

- The overall trend of high birth weight has been decreasing since 2000; however, the percentage of New Brunswick babies born weighing 4,500 g or more (high birth weight) has been mostly higher than the Canadian average.
Healthy eating

Healthy diets are essential for the development and growth of children. Eating breakfast every day, eating fruit and vegetables, and limiting consumption of unhealthy food and beverages are examples of healthier eating habits.

Students in Francophone schools seem to demonstrate better eating habits than their peers in Anglophone schools. Girls also seem to be eating healthier than boys.

Fruit and vegetable consumption

Fruits and vegetables contain a rich source of essential minerals, vitamins and fiber for our bodies. They can also limit the development of chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart diseases, among many other conditions. Children and youth who eat fruit and vegetables five or more times a day are less likely to be overweight or obese compared to those who consume less often.

- Consumption of fruit and vegetables has been stable for children, but has increased for youth.
- Only 1 in 2 children in New Brunswick eat five or more servings of fruit and vegetables daily (as recommended by Canada’s Food Guide) and only 2 out of 5 youth do.
- Immigrant youth consume more fruit and vegetables than their peers.
- New Brunswick youth are on par with their Canadian peers in fruit and vegetable consumption, and the rate is relatively stable (third best after Quebec and Ontario).
**Eating breakfast daily**

Eating breakfast every day can help improve concentration, and increase students’ potential to learn. Students who eat breakfast have improved memory, problem-solving skills and creative abilities.[8]

- The percentage of youth reporting eating breakfast daily is increasing.
- 7 in 10 children and 5 in 10 youth in New Brunswick reported eating breakfast daily.
- Students in Francophone schools seem to eat breakfast daily more often, whereas Aboriginal youth have the lowest rate.

![Chart showing the percentage of New Brunswick students eating breakfast daily from 2009-2016, with Francophone and Aboriginal youth and children data]

**Sweetened non-nutritious beverages**

Limiting the consumption of foods and beverages high in calories, fat, sugar and salt is an important step towards better health and healthy body weight.[9] Excessive regular consumption of non-nutritious beverages adversely affects the appropriate dietary balance of nutrients needed for optimal growth, development, body composition and health.[10][11]

- Consumption of sweetened non-nutritious beverages (e.g. pop or soft drinks, punch, sports drinks and energy drinks) is on the decline.

![Chart showing the percentage of New Brunswick students consuming sweetened non-nutritious beverages from 2009-2016, with Francophone and Aboriginal youth and children data]
Non-nutritious food

The increase in non-nutritious food consumption is a main factor implicated in the spread of the worldwide obesity epidemic. Consuming non-nutritious foods increases calorie intake and can lead to being overweight or obese.\(^{1,2}\)

▶ At least 7 in 10 children and youth consume non-nutritious food (e.g., candy or sweets); consumption is increasing among children, yet relatively stable among youth.

Source: NBHC and Department of Social Development (Wellness Branch), New Brunswick Student Wellness Survey

N.B. students who consume non-nutritious food (e.g. candy or sweets) (%)
**Other determinants of healthy eating**

Some social and economic factors can influence the affordability and availability of healthy food options.

- At least 1 in 10 families with children in New Brunswick experiences moderate to severe food insecurity. This is a vulnerable group that may experience barriers to healthy eating habits, and for whom there is a need to address the social and economic factors that impede the achievement of healthy lifestyles.

- Schools have been playing an important role in supporting healthy eating habits among children and youth. The latest Student Wellness Survey for Grades 6-12 showed improvements in access to healthy food options.
Physical activity

Physical activity can help children achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, reduce stress, increase energy levels, and improve their overall outlook on life. Children who are physically active may experience immediate and long-term positive impacts like improved mental health status and self-esteem, and increased physical fitness, which improves performance of daily activities.

The 2016 edition of the ParticipACTION report highlighted the links between physical activity, screen time and sleep among children and youth. Low levels of physical activity and high levels of sedentary behaviour (such as screen time) is linked to shorter and poorer quality sleep.

Daily physical activity

The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that children and youth accumulate 60 minutes a day doing hard or moderate physical activity.

- New Brunswick youth seem to be slightly more physically active than before.
- 3 out of 5 youth are physically active every day, whereas fewer than 2 in 5 children are.
- Boys, students in Anglophone schools and Aboriginal students are more physically active than their peers, whereas immigrants show the lowest percentage of youth who are physically active on a daily basis.

Source: NBHC and Department of Social Development (Wellness Branch), New Brunswick Student Wellness Survey
Screen time

The Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines call for children and youth to spend less than two hours per day in sedentary recreational activities, such as screen time (watching TV or using a computer). [16]

- The trend for screen time is improving among children, but not among youth.
- More New Brunswick children follow the guidelines for screen time than youth.
- Aboriginal youth seem to spend more time in sedentary screen time compared to their peers.

Source: NBHC and Department of Social Development (Wellness Branch), New Brunswick Student Wellness Survey
References


