

Key points

- Around one in five children aged 5–15 met the ‘five a day’ target for fruit and vegetable consumption in 2008, and the average child ate 3 portions per day. Figures for boys and girls are very similar ([Figure 1](#)). These are self-reported data and may be an overestimate.
- The percentage of children eating 5 or more portions of fruit and vegetables per day rose from around 11% to 21% between 2001 and 2008, though there is some evidence of a drop since the peak in 2006, especially in girls ([Figure 2](#)).
- Children’s fruit and vegetable consumption varies with household income. Those in the highest income bracket are most likely to meet the ‘five a day’ target (27% of boys and 30% of girls) ([Figure 3](#)).
- Children obtain 34–36% of food energy from total fat, a lower figure than in previous years. All boys and younger girls meet the recommended maximum of 35% while older girls’ intake is just above it. Children’s intake of saturated fatty acids is lower than in previous years but remains higher than is recommended (National Diet and Nutrition Survey).
- Around 40% of pupils have catered school lunches. At primary school level, school lunch uptake increased from 39% in 2008/09 to 41% in 2009/10 ([Table 1](#)).
- In 2005 78% of women in England breastfed their babies from birth (Infant Feeding Survey). However, a third of these women had stopped by week 6 so that only 50% of all new mothers were breastfeeding by week 6 and only 26% by 6 months.
- Black and Asian mothers are more likely than White mothers to initiate breastfeeding. This difference is maintained as the child gets older, with 57% of Black mothers and 37% of Asian mothers breastfeeding at six months compared with 23% of White mothers (Infant Feeding Survey).
- Among mothers who are breastfeeding exclusively at birth there is a clear difference in the fall-out rates by socioeconomic group. Mothers in managerial and professional occupations are likely to breastfeed exclusively for longer than mothers in other socioeconomic groups.
- Around two in three boys and three in four girls accurately report that five portions of fruit and vegetables should be consumed each day. However only 22% of boys and 21% of girls can correctly identify the size of a portion.
- Most children aged 11–15 agree that ‘healthy foods are enjoyable’: 72% of girls compared with 64% of boys ([Figure 4](#)).
- Much of the information presented in this briefing is based on self-reported data. People may over or under report consumption of certain foods possibly through a desire to show socially desirable behaviour; there may be inaccuracies in people’s recall of what they have consumed in a 24-hour period and there is also the potential for confusion or misunderstanding about portion size and content of foods. Self-report data should thus be used with caution.

Fruit and vegetable consumption

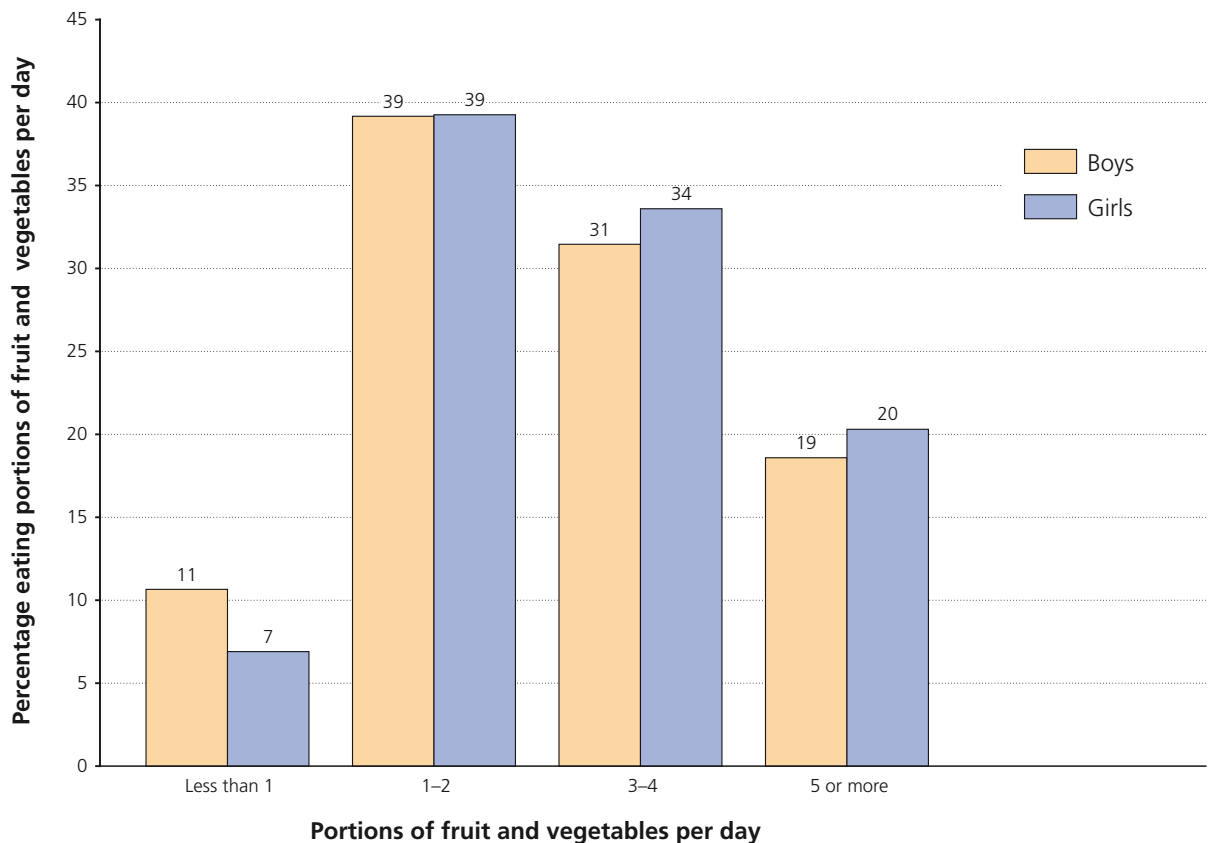
Figures 1–3 show data on fruit and vegetable consumption from the Health Survey for England (HSE). They are based on self-reported information from a 24-hour recall period. Every effort is made to ensure accurate reporting (e.g. by identifying portions using everyday measures), but it has been noted that fruit and vegetable consumption may be over-reported possibly through a desire to show socially desirable behaviour. Parents answer on behalf of children aged 12 and under.

Current fruit and vegetable consumption

Around one in five boys and girls aged 5–15 met the government's recommended 'five a day' guidelines for fruit and vegetable consumption in 2008 (19% of boys and 20% of girls). The average number of portions consumed was approximately 3 per day for both boys and girls.

Figure 1 shows how few children are meeting the recommended 'five a day' target for fruit and vegetable consumption. 11% of boys and 7% of girls eat less than 1 portion per day and 39% of both boys and girls eat 1–2 portions.

FIGURE 1: Portions of fruit and vegetables per day eaten by children (aged 5–15), 2008

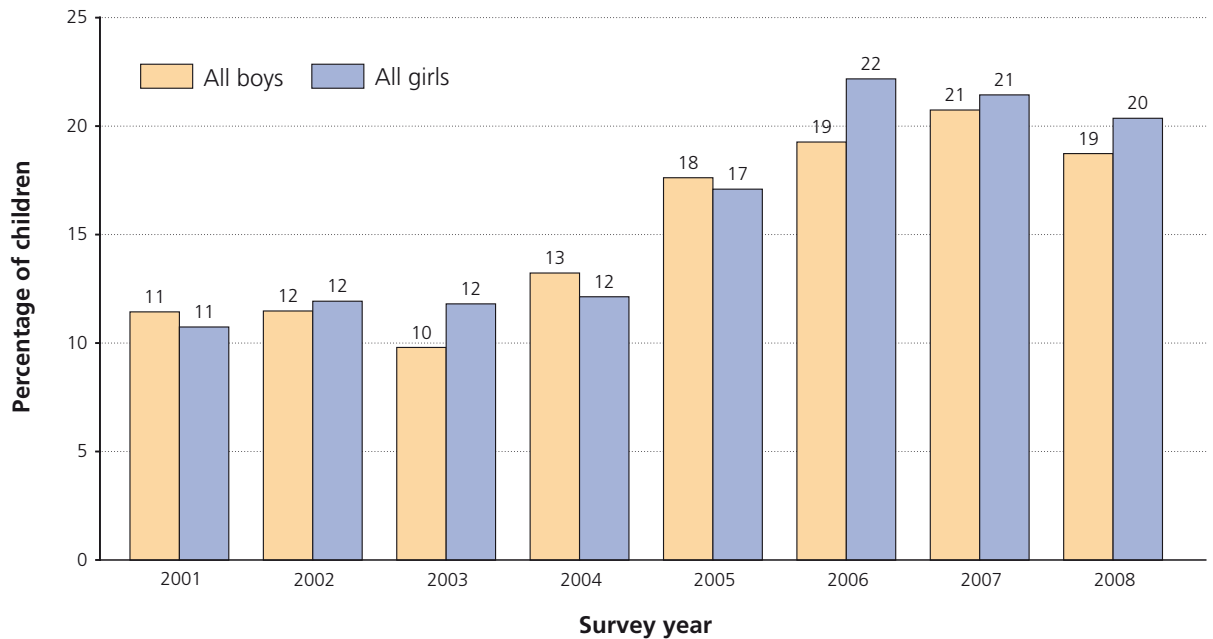


Source: Health Survey for England

Trends in fruit and vegetable consumption

Even though a minority of children meet the 'five a day' target, [Figure 2](#) shows that the percentage of children meeting the target rose from around 11% to 21% between 2001 and 2008. This overall rise conceals a drop between 2006 and 2008, especially in girls.

FIGURE 2: Percentage of children (aged 5–15) eating 5 or more portions of fruit and vegetables per day, 2001 to 2008



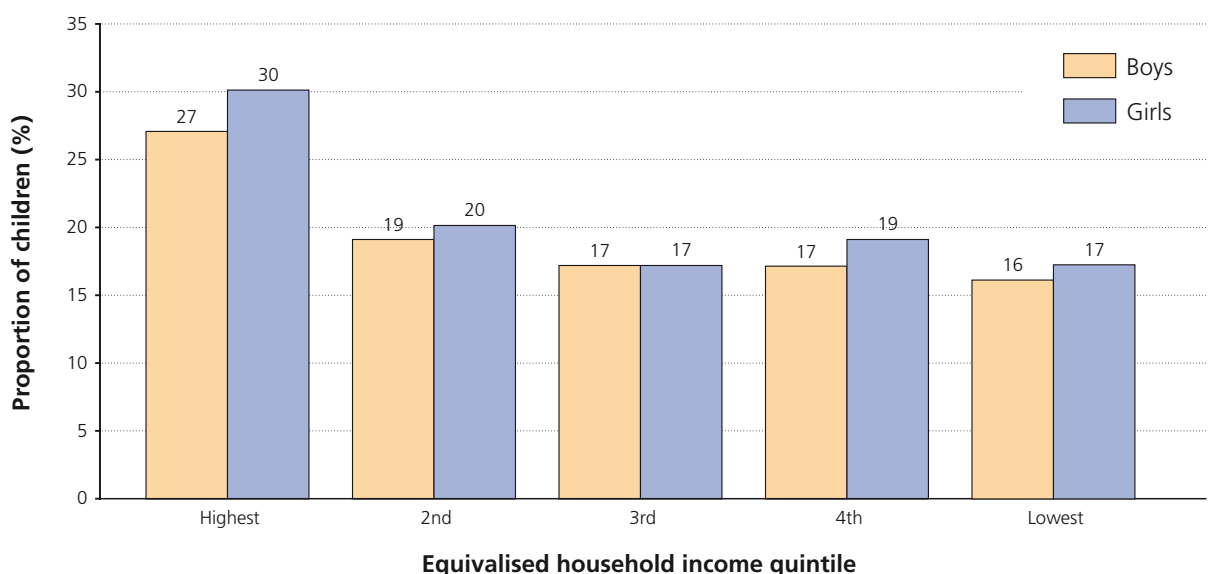
Source: Health Survey for England

Fruit and vegetable consumption by income

Figure 3 shows that children's fruit and vegetable consumption varies with household income. Children in the highest income bracket are most likely to meet the 'five a day' target (27% of boys and 30% of girls). Interestingly, there was not much difference between the remaining four quintiles (results range from 16–19% in boys and 17–20% in girls).

The average number of portions consumed per day (data not shown here) also decreased from the highest income bracket to the lowest. Only 2% of children in the highest quintile had eaten no fruit or vegetables in the last 24 hours, compared to 12% of boys and 7% of girls in the lowest quintile.

FIGURE 3: Proportion of children (aged 5–15) consuming five or more portions of fruit and vegetables per day, by equivalised household income.



Source: Health Survey for England 2008 Report.

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Equivalised household income is a measure that takes account of the number of people in the household. For this analysis, households were split into five equal sized groups banded by income level (income quintiles). Fruit and vegetable portions consumed were compared between these groups.

Children's fat intake

The National Diet and Nutrition Survey shows that children obtain 34–36% of food energy from total fat. The recommended maximum average intake is 35%. All boys and girls aged 4–10 years meet this recommendation while the intake for girls aged 11–18 years is just above it. These figures are lower than in previous years.

Children aged 4–10 years obtain 13.6% of their food energy from saturated fat and those aged 11–18 years obtain 12.9%. These figures are lower than in previous years but still higher than the recommended maximum average intake of 11%.

The recommended maximum average intake of trans fat is 2% of food energy. Trans fat intake is lower than in previous years and at 0.8% of food energy meets the recommendation for all age groups.

Take up of school lunches

Around 40% of primary and secondary school pupils receive catered school lunches, which have to meet certain nutrition and quality standards. Due to a change in methodology used to calculate take up of school lunches, comparable data are only available from 2008/09. Table 1 shows that take up of school lunches increased from 39.3% in 2008/09 to 41.4% in 2009/10, and from 35.0% to 35.8% for secondary schools. This increase equates to approximately 320,000 more pupils taking school lunches.

TABLE 1: Percentage of primary and secondary school pupils who have catered school lunches, England 2008/09 to 2009/10

Percentage of pupils who have school lunches	2008/09	2009/10
Primary schools	39.3%	41.4%
Secondary schools	35.0%	35.8%

*Note. 2008/09 figure for secondary schools was revised from previous
Source: DCSF from data collected annually by School Food Trust.*

Breastfeeding

The Infant Feeding Survey 2005 showed that 78% of women in England breastfed their babies from birth. However, a third of these women had stopped by week 6 so that only 50% of all new mothers were breastfeeding by week 6 and only 26% by 6 months.

In the 2005 survey Black and Asian mothers were more likely than White mothers to initiate breastfeeding. This difference was maintained as the child got older, with 57% of Black mothers and 37% of Asian mothers breastfeeding at six months compared with 23% of White mothers. Breastfeeding rates at six months were also higher among both mothers of Mixed ethnic origin (40%) and Chinese and other ethnic origin (40%) compared with White mothers.

Among mothers who breastfeed exclusively at birth there is a clear difference in the fall-out rates by socioeconomic group. Mothers in managerial and professional occupations are likely to breastfeed exclusively for longer than mothers in other socioeconomic groups.

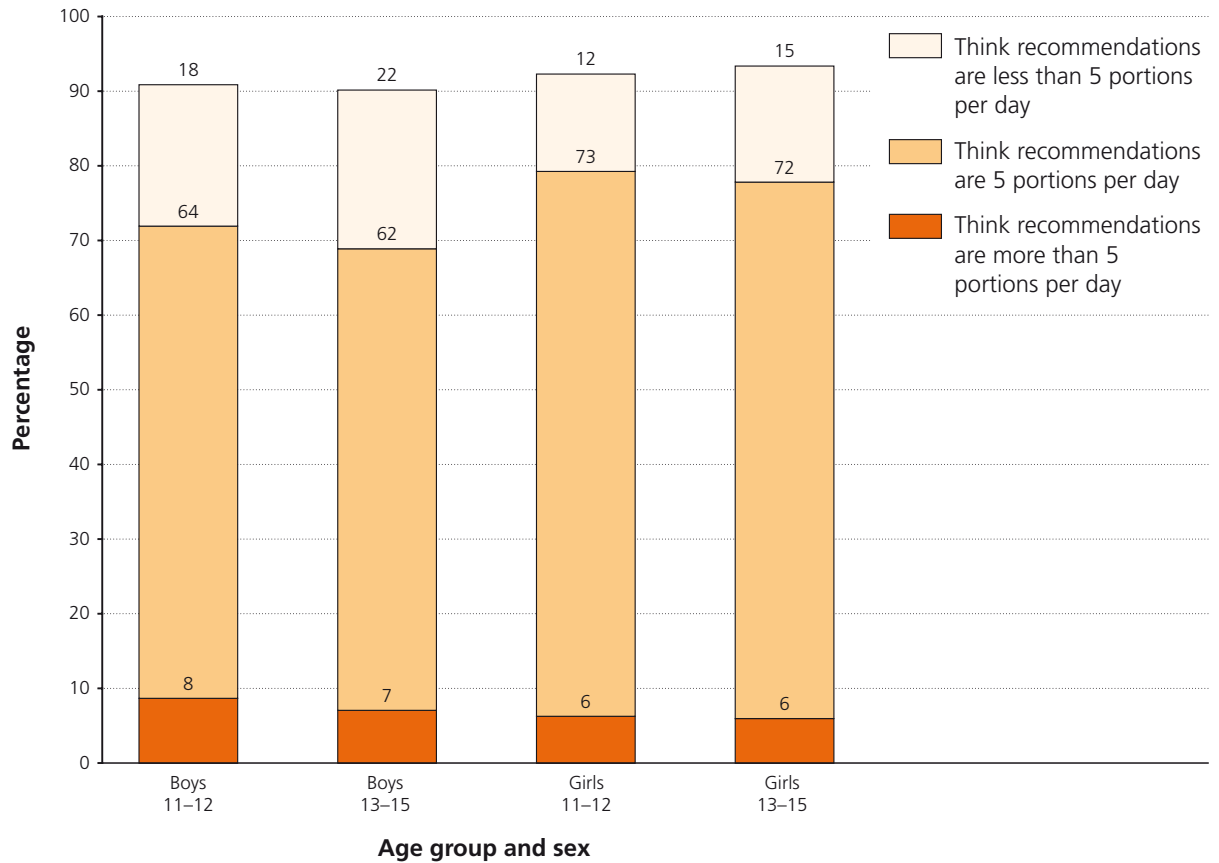
National data are being collected on the percentage of infants who are breastfed at 6–8 weeks (National Indicator 53). However the data are currently too variable and incomplete to generate national estimates.



Knowledge and attitudes to diet

Around two in three boys and three in four girls accurately report that five portions of fruit and vegetables should be consumed each day. However only 22% of boys and 21% of girls can correctly identify the size of a portion.

FIGURE 4: Estimates of the recommended daily fruit and vegetable consumption, by age group and sex (children aged 11–15)



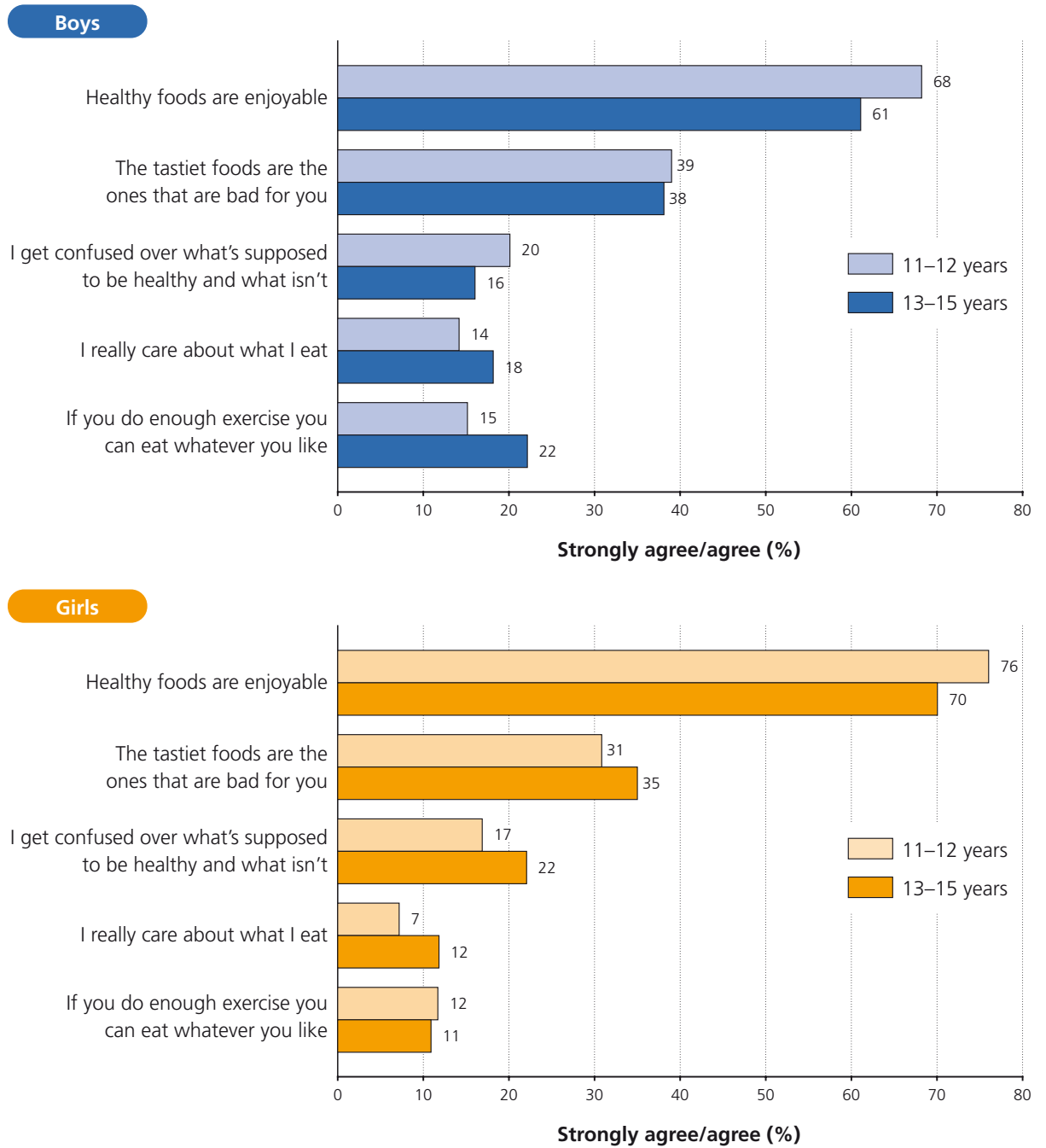
Source: Health Survey for England 2007 Report.

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Figure 5 shows that most children aged 11–15 agree that ‘healthy foods are enjoyable’: 72% of girls and 64% of boys. Fewer than one in four (38% of boys and 34% of girls) agree that ‘the tastiest foods are the ones that are bad for you’. Most children disagree with the statements, ‘I get confused over what’s supposed to be healthy’, ‘if you do enough exercise you can eat whatever you like’ and ‘I don’t really care what I eat’.

Attitudes towards healthy eating are strongly associated with children’s perceptions of their own diet. For example, children who judge their own diet to be healthy are more likely to agree with the statement ‘healthy foods are enjoyable’.

FIGURE 5: Proportion of children (aged 11–15) agreeing with attitudes to healthy eating, by age and sex



Source: Health Survey for England 2007 Report.
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Data sources

Health Survey for England

The HSE is a cross-sectional survey which samples a representative proportion of the population.

Timing of data collection: The survey is conducted annually. Data for some of the time series are available from 1993 onwards. Certain years include 'boost samples' which focus on specific population groups: e.g. 2004 included a boost of individuals from minority ethnic groups. The primary focus of the HSE 2007 was knowledge and attitudes about key aspects of lifestyle data: smoking, drinking, eating and physical activity.

Date of next release: The report on the HSE 2009 is scheduled to be published online in December 2010. The data will be available from the UK Data Archive two to three months after publication of the report.

Infant Feeding Survey

The Infant Feeding Survey is a repeated cross-sectional study that provides baseline statistics about infant feeding practices in the UK.

Timing of data collection: The first Infant Feeding Survey took place in 1975. It is conducted every five years. The 2005 survey was the first to provide separate estimates for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as for the UK as a whole, and to provide estimates of exclusive breastfeeding (where the baby is given only breast milk, no other liquids or solids). The study population for the 2005 survey was mothers who gave birth in the period August–September 2005, resident in the United Kingdom. The early results of the 2005 survey were published in spring 2006 and the full report in spring 2007.

Date of next release: The Infant Feeding Survey 2010 should provide early results in spring 2011.

Take up of school lunches

An annual survey of local authorities in England is carried out by the School Food Trust to measure take up of school lunches. It includes information on catering provision from local authority, private and in-house (school) catering.

Timing of data collection: Data have been collected annually since 2006. The fifth annual survey covered the 2009/10 financial year and the data were available in July 2010.

Date of next release: Data for the 2010/11 financial year will be available in July 2011.

National Diet and Nutrition Survey

The NDNS is a cross-sectional survey of diet and nutritional status of the population. Data on consumption by individuals are gathered using a weighed intake dietary record for four to seven days. Nutritional status is also derived from analysis of blood and urine samples, and background information on dietary habits is also collected through a face to face interview.

Timing of data collection: The surveys have been split into four age groups: pre-school children in 1992 to 1993; older adults in 1994 to 1995; school-age children in 1997 and adults in 2000 to 2001. In April 2008, the NDNS changed to a rolling programme with data collected annually from approximately 500 adults and 500 children (older than 18 months).

Date of next release: Headline results are to be delivered annually. The report of the first year of the NDNS rolling programme (February 2008 to March 2009) was published in February 2010. This report focuses on food consumption and nutrient intakes for adults aged 19 to 64 years and for children aged 18 months to 3 years, 4 to 10 years and 11 to 18 years. Following years' results will be three months later due to a reorganisation of fieldwork. A more detailed report covering four years data (2008 to 2012) will be published in spring 2013.



Useful resources

Health Survey for England

<http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/health-and-lifestyles-related-surveys/health-survey-for-england>

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/PublishedSurvey/HealthSurveyForEngland/Healthsurveyresults/index.htm>

National Diet and Nutrition Survey

<http://www.food.gov.uk/science/dietarysurveys/ndnsdocuments/>

<http://www.food.gov.uk/science/dietarysurveys/ndnsdocuments/ndns0809year1>

Breastfeeding at 6–8 weeks

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/infantfeeding>

Take up of school lunches

<http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/content.asp?ContentId=381#annualsurvey>

http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/UploadDocs/Library/Documents/ni52_statistical_release08-09.pdf

Changes summary

- **March 2010** – original report
- **October 2010** – school meal uptake data updated to include 2009/10 survey results