

Poor diet puts teenagers' health at risk

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A quarter of Australian teenagers eat fast food everyday and more than a third hardly ever eat fruit, a Deakin University study has found.

Researchers with Deakin's Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition Research surveyed more than 3800 secondary school students aged 12—15 years to evaluate their food intake patterns. They found that the diets of a significant number of adolescents fell short of the recommendations outlined in the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating.

"Teenagers need to be eating a variety of foods from the five food groups—breads/cereals, lean meat and meat substitutes, vegetables, fruit and dairy—every day," Professor David Crawford said.

"Our study found that most teenagers are far from having diets that will provide their growing bodies with the nutrients they need to ensure their long term health and wellbeing."

Extra foods—such as fast foods, energy-dense snacks and sugar-sweetened drinks—were consumed by nearly 90 per cent of the teenagers on a daily basis.

Professor Crawford said that this finding was of particular concern.

"The daily inclusion of fast foods coupled with the omission of a variety of healthy foods is setting many teenagers up for serious health problems such as obesity and the psychosocial and other health-related consequences associated with this condition such as diabetes," he said.

The study found that only one third of teenagers ate at least one food from each of the five food groups everyday and just over half ate from each food group 'most days'.

From the five food groups, bread and cereals were the most commonly consumed food group. These were followed by vegetables, dairy foods, meat/eggs/nuts/legumes with fruit the least consumed.

Teenagers in regional areas tended to eat more vegetables and less fast foods than their metropolitan counterparts. Girls' diets included more fruit and less fast food and sweetened drinks than boys, with boys consuming more meat and meat alternatives.

On the positive side, 87 per cent of the adolescents drank water (including low energy-dense drinks) everyday.

Professor Crawford said that the results of the study highlight the need for more public health initiatives targeted at adolescents.

"The next phase of the research, which is currently underway, will explore the key influences on teenager's eating habits, and will be crucial to inform efforts to promote healthy eating in this group," he said.

Source: Research Australia

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