

# Low Fruit, Vegetable Intake Is a Worldwide Problem

March 17 2009, By Kurt Ullman

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A new study that looks at the fruit and vegetable consumption of nearly 200,000 people in developing countries finds that the prevalence of inadequate diet is “remarkably high” across the globe.

Overall, 77.6 percent of men and 78.4 percent of women consumed less than the suggested five daily servings of produce.

“Low [fruit](#) and [vegetable consumption](#) is a risk factor for overweight and obesity, and adequate consumption decreases risk for developing several chronic diseases,” said lead author Spencer Moore. “The release of the 2002-2003 World Health Survey data provided a unique opportunity to examine global differences in low [fruit](#) and [vegetable](#) consumption in a way that has until now simply not been possible.”

Moore is an assistant professor in the School of [Kinesiology](#) and Health Studies at Queen’s University in Ontario, Canada. He and his colleagues looked at data from 196,373 adults in 52 mainly low- and middle-income countries.

The study appears in the May issue of the American [Journal of Preventive Medicine](#).

There were wide variations among nations, ranging from 37 percent of men in Ghana who did not meet that standard — to 99 percent of Pakistani men. The researchers saw similar findings in women with the same two countries at the high and low ends of the spectrum.

The prevalence of low fruit and [vegetable intake](#) increased with age and decreased with income. These results surprised Moore, as surveys from the United States and other developed countries consistently show that fruit and vegetable intake increases with age.

“Most people regardless of the country that they live in simply do not meet the recommended guidelines for adequate fruit and vegetable consumption,” said co-author Justin Hall, a graduate student at Queen’s University. “Some countries appear to be better off than others in relative terms, but the overall prevalence of low fruit and vegetable consumption is remarkably high across the globe.”

Tim Byers, M.D., interim director of the University of Colorado Cancer Center at Denver, said that this study argues against the stereotype that those in tropical climates have better diets because fruits and vegetables surround them.

“Although the survey deals mainly with developing countries, their results are not substantially different from those we have seen in other surveys done in Europe or the United States,” said Byers, who was not involved in the study. “This is telling us that dietary quality is a global problem.”

More information: Hall JN, et al. Global variability in fruit and vegetable consumption. *Am J Prev Med.* 36(5), 2009.

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