

Dietary habits of teenagers could be better

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Adolescents, especially those who are not very physically active, eat too much sweet and fatty foods and not enough fruits and vegetables. This is the conclusion of a study from the Sahlgrenska Academy, at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, on dietary choices, exercise habits and prevalence of obesity among young people.

The study was commissioned by the Region Västra Götaland Public Health Committee and is the first of its kind to focus on 15-16 year olds in Västra Götaland County. In 2008, a survey was distributed to all Västra Götaland residents born in 1992, and the study compares the respondents' dietary habits to the Swedish official dietary guidelines published in 2005 and to the dietary habits of young Swedes according to a national survey conducted by the Swedish National Food Administration in 2008.

Overall, girls make healthier choices than do boys. For example, half of the girls eat fruits and vegetables every day, while only one-third of the boys do. Moreover, girls consume less fast food and drink less sweet drinks. 25 percent of the boys eat hamburgers as well as pizza at least once a week.

'The results are not unique. The gender differences correspond well to findings by the National Food Administration that women of all ages eat more fruit and vegetables than men,' says Heléne Bertéus Forslund, researcher at the Department of Clinical Nutrition, Sahlgrenska Academy, and author of the study.

Boys are more commonly overweight and obese - 18 percent compared to 12 percent for girls.

Around 75 percent of both girls and boys reported eating cookies at least once a week, and around 50 percent of both groups consume sweets and chocolate just about every day. These high numbers for sweets can be contrasted to those for fish and dark bread. According to national guidelines, people should consume fish and seafood two to three times a week. However, only 15 percent of the girls and boys in the study adhered to this recommendation. Seventy percent of both groups eat bread on a daily basis, but only 47 percent of the girls and 40 percent of the boys eat dark bread or crispbread.

The study also reveals that few [adolescents](#) are vegetarians - 92 percent of the girls and 96 percent of the boys reported to eat a mixed diet.

'All in all, the quality of the consumed carbohydrates is low. There is a lot of sugar and not enough dietary fibre, vitamins and minerals. And too much of the energy comes from fat, especially saturated fat,' says Bertéus Forslund.

It is recommended that children and adolescents get at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day. Sixty percent of the surveyed girls and 64 percent of the boys adhere to this recommendation. Teenagers who reported a medium or high level of regular physical activity also reported a higher consumption of fruits and vegetables and fish.

'Dietary habits are formed early in life. Examples of measures to promote healthy eating that are supported by the Public Health Committee include Skolmatsakademin (Eng. the School Lunch Academy), the action programme for overweight and obese individuals and the IDEFICS research study in which the cities of Partille, Mölndal and Alingsås participate. IDEFICS aims to promote healthy dietary and

[exercise habits](#) among children,' says Karin Engdahl (S), chairman of the Västra Götaland Public Health Committee.

Region Västra Götaland is one of Sweden's two popularly elected regions. With over 50,000 employees, it is one of Sweden's largest employers. Västra Götaland County has a population of 1.5 million. Region Västra Götaland is tasked with offering good health and dental care and with providing the prerequisites for good public health, a rich cultural life, a good environment, jobs, research, education and good communications.

Public health matters in Region Västra Götaland are the concern of the Public Health Committee in cooperation with other civil society actors. The Public Health Committee is to contribute to the development and dissemination of public health methods, evaluate and follow up [public health](#) measures, and inform and help to spread knowledge.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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