

Eating your fruits and veggies

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Deb Franko, a professor in the department of counseling and applied educational psychology, explains why some teenagers eat less fruit and vegetables than others. Photo: Brooks Canaday.

(Medical Xpress)—Teenagers in general are relatively unhealthy eaters. But minority teens in particular have higher rates of obesity and eat far fewer fruits and vegetables.

Deb Franko, a professor in the Department of Counseling and Applied Educational Psychology in the Bouvé College of Health Sciences at Northeastern University, and her colleagues recently published a study in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* examining the social and cognitive factors that may explain teens' reluctance to eat their share of bananas, broccoli and baby carrots. The factors that influenced consumption, she explained, were different for minority and nonminority youth.

Franko, whose research focuses on obesity, eating disorders and [body image](#), used baseline data from an eating-disorder prevention study funded by the National Institutes of Health to identify individual, environmental and interpersonal reasons for the [food choices](#) among students at four Boston-area high schools.

"If we could understand a little bit more about why adolescents do or don't eat fruits and vegetables," Franko speculated, "then that might have implications for interventions designed to reduce risk for obesity."

In the study, both minority and nonminority students cited a variety of barriers to eating fruits and vegetables, but other predictors were unique to the minority participants. Minorities with a strong belief in accomplishing the goals they set their minds to, for example, were more likely than their peers to eat fruits and vegetables. The same correlation was not found among nonminority students, who all had relatively high self-efficacy.

Having familial support and understanding the benefits of eating five fruits and vegetables each day, the study found, were key factors to predicting whether minority students would be more or less likely to eat their greens.

Franko said increasing awareness of the lifelong benefits of eating healthfully or targeting self-efficacy through school programs would be easier than boosting economic status, which other studies have identified as a main reason why minorities eat fewer [fruits and vegetables](#).

"We hope to use our findings to develop interventions that will encourage eating more fruits and vegetables among both minority and nonminority adolescents," she said.

Provided by Northeastern University

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