

# Lots of fruits and vegetables, but lots of high-fat snacks

May 6 2014

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The home is an important microenvironment in models of obesity and can trigger behaviors both positively and negatively associated with weight status. With this in mind, a group of researchers from Emory's Rollins School of Public Health, and the Cancer Coalition of South Georgia sought to examine the home food environment and determine which aspects are associated with healthy eating in low-income overweight and obese women who receive healthcare through local federally-qualified community health centers.

Among a group of primarily obese, African American female patients in southwest Georgia, researchers looked at food inventories, food placement, grocery shopping, [food preparation](#), meal serving practices, family [meals](#) from non-home sources, television watching while eating, and family support for [healthy eating](#).

Participant behaviors were first documented at baseline and then at 6- and 12-month with follow-up telephone interviews. The women, all of whom lived with at least 1 other person, reported an average of 14 types of fruits and vegetables in their home, 4.6 unhealthy foods in the home during the past week, and 1.8 unhealthy beverage items. They occasionally used healthy food preparation methods, and they used healthy meal-serving practices fairly often. Participants reported serving family meals from non-home sources 2.6 days per week; most often those meals came from fast-[food](#) restaurants or takeout. Eating evening meals, other meals, and snacks in front of the television was fairly common.

According to lead author Michelle C. Kegler, DrPH, "Many factors likely contribute to obesity in South Georgia, but the home clearly plays a role through easy access to high fat snacks and sugar-sweetened beverages like sweet tea. The methods used for preparing meals also make a difference like frying versus baking."

This led the researchers to conclude that although fruit and vegetables in the home were plentiful, the methods of preparation and availability of high-calorie foods in the home may be contributing to obesity. Likewise, eating in front of the television was fairly common, and may be a challenging practice to address when people spend a lot of time at home.

According to the researchers of this study, future work should use these results to examine social and other types of support in the home necessary to change behaviors that lead to [obesity](#). Likewise, studies should examine how the home [food environment](#) varies in different regions.

**More information:** "The Influence of Home Food Environments on Eating Behaviors of Overweight and Obese Women," by Michelle C. Kegler, DrPH; Iris Alcantara, MPH; Regine Haardörfer, PhD; Julie A. Gazmararian, PhD; Denise Ballard, MEd; Darrell Sabbs (DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2014.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2014.01.001)), *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, Volume 46/Issue 3 (May, 2014)

Provided by Elsevier

Citation: Lots of fruits and vegetables, but lots of high-fat snacks (2014, May 6) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-05-lots-fruits-vegetables-high-fat-snacks.html>

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