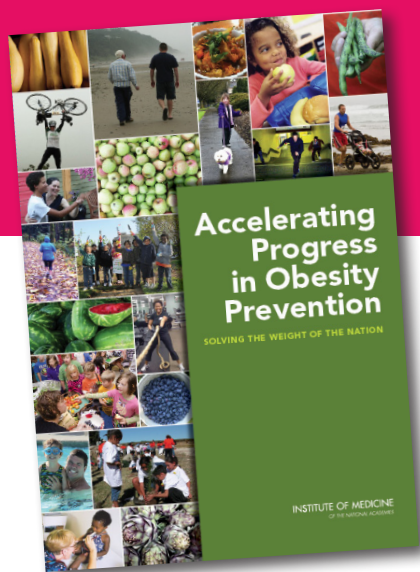


Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention

SOLVING THE WEIGHT OF THE NATION

AN EXPERT REPORT FROM THE INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE



The Challenges We Face: More than one-third of adults and close to one-fifth of children and adolescents in the United States are obese. Obesity's effects on health and health care costs could become catastrophic. While many communities are taking important steps to reduce the epidemic, accelerating progress is critical. Success requires action from all of us in the places where we live, work, learn, and play. Progress in one area will reinforce progress in others.

Strengthening Schools as the Heart of Health

Schools have a tradition of supporting the health and well-being of their students. Children and teens spend up to half of their waking hours in school and may consume more than half of their daily calories there. This puts schools in a unique position to support students in getting optimum physical activity, eating healthily, and achieving and maintaining a healthy weight—not only in the short term but over their lifetimes.

Why should we strive to bring this vision to life?

Because physically active, well-nourished students learn more and do better in school.

TODAY'S REALITY

Many schools fall short of providing 60 minutes of daily physical activity.

Only 4 percent of elementary schools, 8 percent of middle schools, and 2 percent of high schools provide daily physical education.

Many schools offer meals, snack foods, and drinks that are too high in unhealthy fats, sodium, and added sugars.

Students in grades K-12 get an average of 4-6 hours of nutrition education per school year.

TOMORROW'S VISION

Children in grades K-12 have opportunities to get 60 minutes of physical activity every school day, including quality physical education.

Physical activity outside of physical education includes safe routes to walk to school, classroom physical activity breaks, active recesses, and after school physical activity programming.

School playgrounds are open after hours for community use.

All foods and beverages in schools meet strong nutrition standards.

Only health-promoting foods and beverages are marketed in schools.

Children in grades K-12 get at least 20 hours of lessons and hands-on activities about food and nutrition per school year.

See the other solutions in this series:

- Food and Drink
- Physical Activity
- Marketing
- Workplaces
- Health Care

www.iom.edu/acceleratingobesityprevention

How could this vision come to life in your community's schools?

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Provide plenty of safe play and fitness equipment.
- Create a walk-to-school program.
- Offer "open gym" in the morning before school, physical activity breaks in the classroom, and organized physical activities or intramural sports after school.
- Develop relationships between your schools and the community that allow school recreation areas to be used by community residents outside of school hours.
- Require daily quality physical education.

NUTRITION

- Increase fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat or non-fat dairy products; reduce foods high in solid fats and added sugars; and make portion sizes age-appropriate in the cafeteria.
- Stock any vending machines with healthy beverages and snacks.
- Make plain, good-tasting water available at all times.
- Create budgets that don't rely on the sale of unhealthy foods to support school programs.
- Create a list of healthy foods or non-food items to sell to raise funds.
- Provide healthy foods or non-food items for classroom celebrations.

FOOD AND NUTRITION EDUCATION

- Provide nutrition education with hands-on activities, such as gardening, food shopping, food preparation, or food tasting.
- Provide training for teachers in food and nutrition education and physical education.

Why should we strive to bring this vision to life?

Evidence shows that...

- Physical activity and a nutritious diet are associated with improvements in learning ability, behavior, and academic performance.
- Physically active, well-nourished students are less likely to miss school for health reasons.
- Improvements in physical activity and nutrition at school give students of all backgrounds opportunities for leading healthier, more productive lives.
- Children who have early experiences with healthy foods are more likely to prefer and eat those foods later and to develop eating patterns that promote healthy growth and weight.
- Food and nutrition education can improve nutrition knowledge and eating habits, and positively affect weight.

INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE

OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES

Advising the nation • Improving health

500 Fifth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

TEL 202.334.2352

FAX 202.334.1412

www.iom.edu

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