

Nutrition
Support and encourage! Eating habits of students

What do we know about the eating patterns of children and young people nowadays? How much responsibility do we have for them? How have changes in conventional work schedules and traditional family roles and lives influenced food habits? What is the role of industrialization and urbanization in eating patterns? How aware and prepared are we to cope with the modern food industry and its strategies? How do we deal with a generation for which fast food is not only the most convenient, easily available food choice but is counted as a status quotient and at the same time a well reputed social affair? How can a school respond to the obesogenic environment of modern life?

Eating behaviors of children and adolescents are influenced by many factors. Experts divide them in three broad categories:

- a. Personal (attitudes, beliefs, food preferences, self-efficacy and biological changes)
- b. Environmental (immediate social environment such as family, friends and peer networks, and other factors such as school, fast food outlets and social and cultural norms)
- c. Macrosystems (food availability, food production and distribution systems, mass media and advertising)

It is important to support and encourage healthy eating and exercise habits in children as they are usually developed early and tend to persist throughout life.

Among the prevailing patterns the following have been reported:



1. **Skipping meals especially breakfast** mainly due to lack of time, desire to sleep longer in the morning, lack of appetite and dieting.
2. **Snacking behavioris** extremely common and since children and adolescents often snack on what is readily available, providing healthy snacks is of great importance.
3. **Eating outside the home and takeaways.** Modern busy schedules as well as lifestyles and family roles have resulted in excessive eating outside the house and takeaways.
Both snacking and eating not-home-made meals have resulted in:
 - **Inadequate fiber, raw fruit and vegetable consumption**
 - **High consumption of total fats, saturated fats and added sugars**
 - **Decreased milk consumption (low-fat replaced by high-fat)**
 - **Increased consumption of soft drinks and non-citrus juices/drinks**
4. **Dieting practices** and weight control behaviors among adolescents, especially girls
5. **Food mood connections:** Stress and emotional upsets can seriously affect the energy balance especially in adolescents, resulting in the consumption of too little or too much food.

Possible additional reading/websites that can be found free online:

- <http://www.euractiv.com/section/health-consumers/news/eu-teens-have-bad-dietary-habits/>
- HEALTHY EATING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN EUROPE A school-based nutrition education guide
- Guidelines for Adolescent Nutrition Services, Edited by Jamie Stang, Ph.D., M.P.H., R.D. and Mary Story, Ph.D., R.D.