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Special points of interest:

- Most youth describe themselves as the right weight
- Overweight youth rated their health as poorer
- Girls tend to describe themselves as overweight and more boys described themselves as underweight
- Youth eating less than the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables

Perceptions of Weight & Eating Habits

Weight

“Body weight, which is largely determined by eating patterns and exercise, is a significant contributor to children's self-image, which in turn has important effects on their mental health, sense of competence and control over life circumstances. Adolescence is a particularly difficult time for young people — adolescent girls, especially, are at risk for eating disorders.”(Health Canada 1999).

Obesity is becoming more common among Canadian children. In the past 25 years, the proportion of young people who are overweight or obese has jumped from 15% to 26%. In 2004, 19% of Saskatchewan children age 2-17 were overweight and 10% were obese, slightly higher than the Canadian average for combined overweight/obese at 26%(CCSD 2006). 35% of males and 20.9% of females 12-14 were overweight or obese in 2005 and 33% of males and 25% of females 15-17 were overweight or obese in 2005 (Statistics Canada 2007). In this study of rural youth, rates of overweight (18.4%) and obese (6.7%) were lower than the Canadian and Saskatchewan averages.

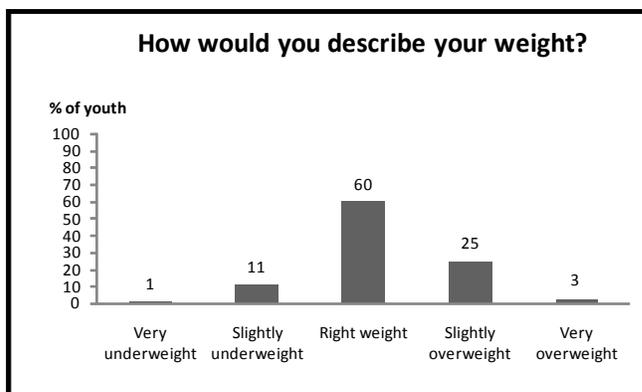
Female youth have a higher risk of eating disorders such as bingeing and purging, self-induced vomiting and refusal to eat (Health Canada 1999; Boyce

2004). In this study of rural youth almost 5% of females had vomited or taken laxatives to lose weight. Male youth have also been shown to be concerned with gaining weight, sometimes using supplements or steroids. (Health Canada 1999)

Healthy Eating

Food choices play an important role in nutritional health and significantly influence health status” (Health Canada 1999). Eating patterns that lead to the development of nutrition-related chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, osteoporosis and cancer may begin in childhood or youth (Canadian Dietetic Association, 1996, p. 4). Although Canada’s Food Guide recommends five to 10 servings of fruits and vegetables each day, most children eat less than the recommended amounts. However, female youth are much more likely than male youth to eat fruits and vegetables regardless of their age (CCSD 2006). In this study, rural youth also consumed less than the recommended daily amounts of fruit and vegetables.

How do you describe your weight?



Youth in the survey were asked to describe their weight. Most youth (59.8%) described their weight as the right weight, followed by slightly overweight (25.4%).

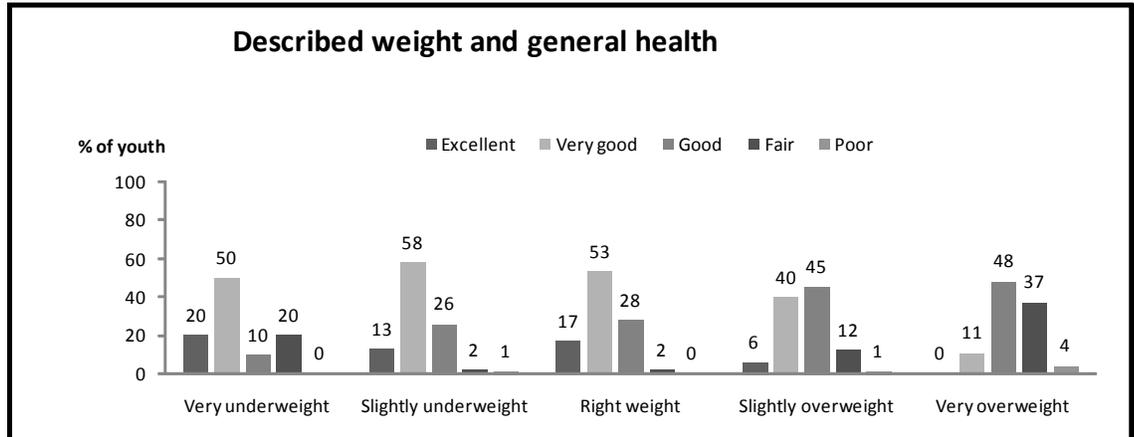
There were no strong differences between youth of different ages and how they described their weight.

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Weight and general health

“I’ll openly say it, I want to be bigger. Instead of losing weight I would rather put on weight, like muscles and stuff I guess. Like for grad, I guess if you want to lose weight to fit into your dress, I want to put on more weight and get bigger to fill out a suit kind of thing.”- Youth Focus Group Participant



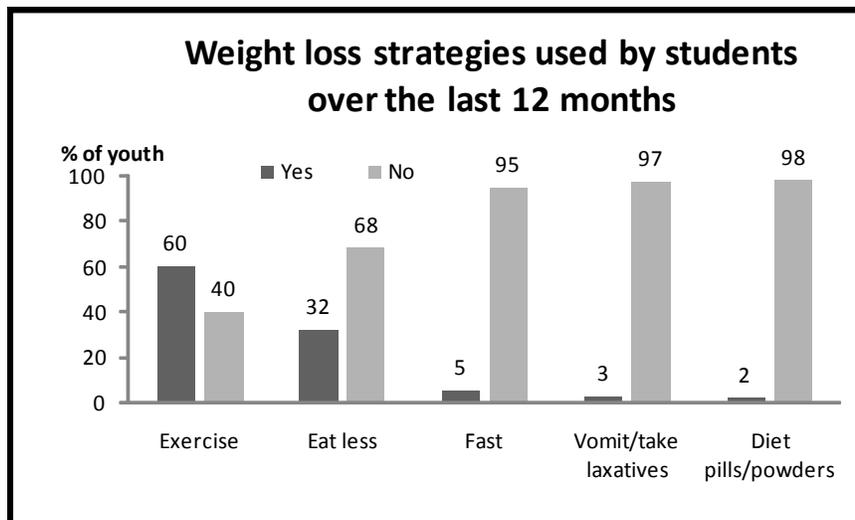
Youth’ self descriptions of their health were compared to their self assessments of their health. There is a relationship between youth’ answers to these two questions after controlling for

gender and age. Youth who described themselves as underweight or the right weight would more likely rate their health as very good. On the other hand, youth who described themselves

as overweight (slightly or very) would generally rate their health as good to fair. Over 3.7% of very overweight youth rated their health as poor, the highest proportion out of all categories.

Exercise and eating less most common weight loss strategies

“As far as weight loss and stuff and laxatives and diet pills and all that stuff, girls are a lot more likely to do that than guys. I don’t know any guy that would force themselves to puke unless they had too much booze in their stomach.”- Youth Focus Group Participant



39% of youth reported that they were trying to lose weight. Youth were asked if they used different strategies to lose weight or keep from gaining weight, over the past 12 months. The two most common ways to lose weight or keep from gaining weight among youth were to

exercise for the purpose of weight loss, or to eat less (this also includes eating fewer calories and fats). Close to 5% of youth said that they tried fasting, which means eating nothing for a period of at least 24 hours. 3.2% of youth said they vomited or took laxatives, and only 1.8%

used diet pills or powders. There was a strong difference between a youths’ age and whether or not they would eat less to lose weight or keep from gaining it. Otherwise there were no strong relationships to student age and using these different ways to lose weight.

Body image varies between males and females

Much has been said about the differences between boys and girls and how they view their bodies. In the study there are a large number of differences between boys and girls, including the following:

- Females were more likely to describe themselves as slightly or very overweight (27.7% and 3.3% for females vs 22.3% and 2.3% for males).
- Males were more likely to describe themselves as slightly or very underweight (15% and 1.5% for males; 8.0% and 0.7% for females).
- Over twice as many females as males (51.1% vs 23.1%) want to lose weight.
- Almost eight times as many males wish to gain weight (2.8% of females; 21.3% of males).
- Males were more likely to say that they were trying to stay the same weight or do nothing.
- More females reported exercising to stay the same weight or to lose weight (65.5% of females vs. 51.9% of males).
- More than double the number of females changed their diets to lose weight or to stay the same weight (42.3% of females vs. 17.8% of males).
- Over 7% of females compared to 1% of males said they fasted in the previous month.
- Females were close to five times more likely to vomit or take laxatives to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight (4.9% of females; 1.0% of males).
- When the comparison was controlled for age and sex, girls between the ages of 13 and 15 years who reported being very or slightly overweight were more likely to have sad feelings or thoughts of suicide.

“I don’t think girls really realize like how much pictures on TV and on billboards and everything, how much it’s really been changed from what it really is. And so they don’t realize that they’re being exposed to fakeness they just think that’s what’s real. And so when they read through magazines they’re like well they’re looking at the clothes but they’re not realizing that when looking at the clothes there’s a model in it too who’s been changed and made to look how the media wants them to look and so a lot of times, especially in magazines they’re looking at it for the clothes but in doing that they’re also seeing all the perfect girls and guys in it and it’s not registering consciously but it’s sub-consciously in their minds already from everywhere you look.” - Youth Focus Group Participant

What are you doing about your weight?

Youth were asked if they wanted to lose weight, gain weight, stay the same weight or do nothing about their weight. Most youth (39.2%) responded that they were trying to lose weight. A smaller number of youth

(10.7%) said they were trying to gain weight. There was a strong difference between what youth were doing with respect to their weight and age. While younger youth were generally more likely to say that they were doing

nothing with respect to their weight, older youth were more likely to say that they were trying to lose weight. For example, 47.3% of youth 17 years old or older said they wanted to lose weight

Weight, healthy eating and physical activity

Youths’ answers about what they are eating, and their levels of physical activity were compared to how they described their weight.

When these comparisons were controlled for gender and age, there were no strong relationships between how youth described their weight and their levels of physical activity. For

example, youth who described themselves as the right weight watched similar amounts of television in a school day as youth who described themselves as very overweight, after the comparison was controlled for sex and age.

There were no strong differences between youth’s described weights and their eating habits.

“I think girls eat small portions of meals to lose weight and other people eat bigger meals.” - Youth Focus Group Participant

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Views, conclusions, and recommendations in this fact sheet do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the organizations or agencies sponsoring or contributing to the research in various ways.

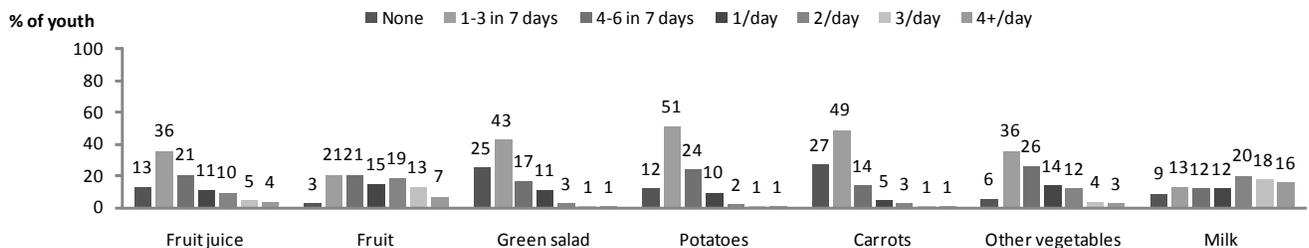
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What are Youth Eating?

What students ate/drank in last 7 days



Although Canada’s Food Guide recommends 7 servings of fruits and vegetables each day for females 14 to 18 and 8 servings for males, only 23.6% of the rural youth indicated they had consumed more than 5 servings of fruit

and vegetable per day in the week prior to the survey. 76.4% consumed less than 5 servings. Youth were more likely to consume fruit than vegetables. There were no significant differences by sex or age in the consumption of

fruits and vegetables.

Canada’s Food Guide recommends 3-4 servings of milk and milk products per day. 33.6% of students reported drinking this amount of milk. Males drank more milk than females. While girls drank

more fruit juice, and ate more salad and other vegetables than males.

While these measures are not precise, they do suggest that nutritional education is needed for this group of rural youth.