

Dietary Choices of South Asian Youth

Nearly a third of Canadian children aged five to seventeen years old are overweight.ⁱ Despite South Asians being the single largest minority group in Canadaⁱⁱ, little is known about the dietary choices or risks for obesity and obesity related medical conditions for youth of South Asian descent being raised in Canada.

Ten percent of students aged 12–19 who completed the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey (2013 BC AHS) were of South Asian descent. This study focused on the food and drink choices of Canadian-born and foreign-born South Asian (East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan etc.) youth. The findings were reviewed by members of the South Asian community who provided context to the results.

Students who completed the 2013 BC AHS were asked to indicate the frequency at which they consumed various different types of foods and beverages on the day before they took the survey. The results showed that 80% of South Asian youth ate vegetables or green salad that day, 80% ate sweets and half ate fast food.



There were some differences between youth born abroad and those born in Canada as South Asian youth not born in Canada drank water more frequently than those born in Canada, and foreign-born South Asian males ate vegetables more often than Canadian-born males.

As part of this study a healthy eating score was determined for each student, which calculated their consumption of healthy foods such as fruit, vegetables and salad, and also took into account their consumption of less healthy foods such as fast food and sweets. Based on the healthy eating scores, South Asian males born in Canada were half as likely to eat healthily as their foreign-born counterparts.

This fact sheet was created by McCreary Centre Society's student group member Shevonne Thind in partial fulfillment of a Master's in Science of Nursing Degree, University of British Columbia, with the support of Dr. Ryan Watson, postdoctoral fellow affiliated with the McCreary Centre Society and the University of British Columbia.

To view provincial, regional, and topic-specific results, and learn more about the BC AHS, visit: www.mcs.bc.ca/ahs.

To learn more about McCreary's student group, or if you are a student who might be interested in joining, please visit: www.mcs.bc.ca/



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The relationship between dietary choices and cultural connectedness was also explored. Results showed that South Asian youth who engaged in weekly cultural activities were more likely to eat healthily than those who did not participate in cultural activities this regularly.

The study also found that South Asian females who ate their evening meals with their parents most or all of the time were more likely to eat healthily.

Community consultations

These findings were shared with members of the South Asian community at a project advisory meeting. Participants noted the results showed the importance of eating meals as a family but suggested a Western lifestyle presented challenges to this. Parents want to eat with their children and provide healthy meals. However, they also want to give their children opportunities to engage in extra-curricular activities and have to work themselves, which reduces the chances to eat together and increases the use of convenient foods.

Participants felt the role of cultural connectedness in healthy eating and other aspects of positive youth development should be further explored.



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ⁱ Roberts, K., Shields, M., Groh, M., Aziz, A., & Gilbert, J.-A. (2012). Overweight and obesity in children and adolescents: results from the 2009–2011 Canadian Health Measures Survey. *Health Reports (Statistics Canada Catalogue 82-003)*, 23 (3), 3-7.

ⁱⁱ Statistics Canada, 2013 *Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada*. Statistics Canada. Ottawa: Minister of Industry.