



Federal School Lunches -- But Not Breakfasts -- Linked to Childhood Obesity, Research Finds

ScienceDaily (Aug. 26, 2010) — With children going back to school, parents are concerned that their youngsters are staying fit and eating right, especially those who dine in a school cafeteria.

New research funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture finds that children who eat school lunches that are part of the federal government's National School Lunch Program are more likely to become overweight.

The same research study found, however, that children who eat both the breakfast and lunch sponsored by the federal government are less heavy than children who don't participate in either, and than children who eat only the lunch, says economist Daniel L. Millimet at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

Millimet authored the study with economists Rusty Tchernis, Georgia State University, and Muna S. Hussain, Kuwait University.

"The fact that federally funded school lunches contribute to the childhood obesity epidemic is disconcerting, although not altogether surprising," said Millimet, whose research expertise is the economics of children, specifically topics related to schooling and health.

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Link Between Walking, Cycling and Health

ScienceDaily (Aug. 20, 2010) — Want a slimmer, healthier community? Try building more sidewalks, crosswalks and bike paths.

A study authored by Professor David Bassett Jr. from the Department of Kinesiology, Recreation and Sport Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and three other researchers was published August 19 in the American Journal of Public Health, concluding that communities with more walkers and cyclists are healthier than those where people must rely on cars to get around.

John Pucher of Rutgers University was the lead researcher on the project. Ralph Buehler of Virginia Tech and Dr. Andrew Dannenberg of the National Center for Environmental Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention collaborated on the project.

The researchers analyzed city- and state-level data from the United States and international data from 15 countries to study the relationship between "active travel" -- bicycling or walking rather than driving -- and physical activity, obesity and diabetes.

The results showed that more than half of the differences in obesity rates among countries is linked to walking and cycling rates. In addition, about 30 percent of the difference in obesity rates among states and cities is linked to walking and cycling rates.

Bassett said this study is part of the mounting evidence that active travel has significant health benefits.

"Perhaps the greatest strength of our analysis was that it showed that the relationship between active travel and health was discernible at three different geographic levels: international, state and city," the study says.

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Overweight American Children and Adolescents Becoming Fatter

ScienceDaily (Aug. 19, 2010) — Overweight American children and adolescents have become fatter over the last decade, according to researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and National Institute on Aging (NIA). They examined adiposity shifts across socio-demographic groups over time and found U.S. children and adolescents had significantly increased adiposity measures such as body mass index (BMI), waist circumference (WC) and triceps skinfold thickness (TST).

The increases in adiposity were more pronounced in some sex-ethnic groups such as black girls. In addition, these groups gained more abdominal fat over time, which was indicated by waist size and posed greater health risks than elevated BMI. Their results are featured in the August 2010 issue of the International Journal of Pediatric Obesity.

"Our analysis shows that the increase in adiposity among U.S. children and adolescents was unequally distributed across socio-demographic groups and across the spectrum of BMI, waist circumference and triceps skinfold thickness measures," said Youfa Wang, MD, PhD, senior author of the study and an associate professor in the Bloomberg School's Department of International Health. "Heavier children and adolescents gained more adiposity, especially waist size, and these findings were most significant among children ages 6 to 11. Ethnic disparities in mean BMI have also increased substantially when comparing black girls with their white counterparts for all ages combined. Solely examining the changes in the prevalence of overweight and obesity based on fixed BMI cut points could not gain such important insights regarding shifts in the obesity epidemic."

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