

Kinesiology expert comments on latest federal survey on American diets

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Kids are consuming fewer calories, and adults are eating less fast food, according to a federal government survey released Feb. 21.

University of Virginia kinesiology professor John Sirard is "cautiously optimistic" about findings of the latest [National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey](#).

Data from the survey, "[Caloric Intake From Fast Food Among Adults: United States, 2007-2010](#)," showed that adults consumed 11.3 percent of their total daily calories from fast food. That represents a decrease from 2003-06, when approximately 13 percent of adults' calories were consumed from fast food.

The survey on "[Trends in Intake of Energy and Macronutrients in Children and Adolescents From 1999-2000 Through 2009-2010](#)" found that:

- Among children and adolescents aged 2 to 19, the caloric intakes decreased for most age groups between 1999-2000 and 2009-10.
- Trends in the protein, carbohydrate and fat intakes were inconsistent.
- The percentage of calories from protein, [carbohydrate](#) and fat were within the ranges recommended for these macronutrients for this age group, but the percentage of calories from [saturated fat](#) was above the 10 percent recommended in the Dietary

Guidelines for Americans, 2010. In 2009-10, on average, U.S. children and adolescents consumed between 11 percent and 12 percent of [kilocalories](#) from saturated fat.

Of the findings from these two studies, which make up the latest survey, Sirard, assistant professor of kinesiology at U.Va.'s Curry School of Education and Youth-Nex: The U.Va. Center to Promote Effective Youth Development, said "I'm cautiously optimistic regarding the decrease in adult fast food consumption. While it may be an anomaly, this positive behavioral change may indicate that increased consumer knowledge on the [health risks](#) associated with fast [food consumption](#) is taking hold and people are making healthier choices. I hope so. If parents are eating less fast food, hopefully their children are eating less, too."

The findings for caloric intakes in youth are less clear-cut, Sirard said.

"The overall decrease in [caloric intake](#), along with a 3 percent increase in the prevalence of pediatric obesity during the same time frame, is not entirely consistent. Unfortunately, we have rather limited high-quality data on youth physical activity and sedentary screen-time behaviors in our large-scale surveillance efforts, like NHANES. So, a decrease in physical activity or an increase in sedentary behaviors may be responsible.

"Also, this brief report does not provide detail regarding diet quality. The percentage of calories from carbohydrates may have decreased in the past 10 years, but it's difficult to say if that is a good thing or not. Decreasing intake of complex carbohydrates (whole grains, high-fiber foods) would be a negative change while decreasing consumption of white bread and corn chips would be a positive change. We'll need to wait for some more detailed analyses to get at this issue."

Provided by University of Virginia

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