

Children & Nutrient Shortfalls



PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN WITH SHORTFALLS OF ESSENTIAL NUTRIENTS



Source: NHANES 2001–2008¹

The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) is a survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). NHANES is designed to assess the health and nutritional status of adults and children in the United States. The survey is unique in that it combines interviews and physical examinations. The statistics reported in this fact sheet are based on the EAR, which is helpful for assessing population needs.

For more information visit:

Dietary Guidelines for Americans | www.dietaryguidelines.gov

Nutrition.gov | www.nutrition.gov

National Institutes of Health MedlinePlus | www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/nutrition.html

National Osteoporosis Foundation | www.nof.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention | www.cdc.gov

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/overwt.htm>

² Fulgoni V. NHANES 2001-2008 analysis. 2011 unpublished.

³ Warensjo E, Byberg L, Melhus H, et al. Dietary calcium intake and risk of fracture and osteoporosis: prospective longitudinal cohort study. *BMJ* 2011;342:d1473.

America is in the midst of a nutrition crisis that has yet to be fully addressed.

- Children (ages 4–18) have several shortfalls of key nutrients such as vitamins A, D and E and calcium and magnesium.¹
- Of particular note, 75 percent of children are not meeting the recommended intake for vitamin D and more than half are not consuming enough calcium or vitamin E. Nearly 40 percent of children are falling short on the recommended amount of magnesium, which plays a role in maintaining the conversion of food into cellular energy.²
- Childhood is an important time for building healthy bones, and how bones are built during this time can affect the risk of osteoporosis later in life.³ The shortfalls of important bone-building nutrients, vitamin D, magnesium and calcium, are particularly concerning for children.

Current dietary and lifestyle choices have led to a growing gap between the amount of nutrients people should consume and the actual nutrients they are consuming.

- The Healthy Eating Index (HEI) is a measure of diet quality based on how many servings of food from various food groups are eaten. Children score about 48.5 out of a possible 100 points.²
- The HEI score shows that most children need to make significant changes in how they eat to meet nutrient goals.

Nutrient shortfalls left unaddressed have the potential to lead to chronic diseases such as osteoporosis⁴, which will increase healthcare costs.

- With high rates of childhood obesity, nutrition is increasingly important. Making dietary changes to maintain a healthy weight requires special attention to make food choices that will help fill nutrient shortfalls.