

Why should I care?

The food we eat affects more than the size of our waistbands. There's a direct line between poor nutrition and many of the leading causes of death in America such as heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes.¹

Healthy eating is important at any age, but the food on a young person's plate can shape his or her health and growth for life. So it's disturbing to see CDC data that shows most U.S. youth don't eat enough fruits and vegetables or whole grains, yet they typically exceed the recommended maximum daily intake of sodium and sugar.²

Today, nearly one in three kids in America are either overweight or obese and at risk of developing a chronic illness.³ Obesity presents a health equity challenge, as it negatively affects some populations more than others.⁴ There are a few no-brainer fixes to get our families eating healthier:

Help kids eat well at school. We can help address nutrition and hunger issues by providing children healthy meals while they're at school.

Help people make informed choices about what they eat. The Affordable Care Act included a measure that requires chain restaurants to post nutrition information about the food they serve on menus and menu boards. We need to keep building on the rule by ensuring that it's fully implemented and enforced so consumers can make informed decisions wherever they shop for food. A number of studies show that menu labeling is effective in helping consumers choose healthier foods.⁵

Wipe out food deserts. Many urban neighborhoods and rural towns have plenty of fast food chains and convenience stores but not enough grocery stores selling fresh, healthy and affordable food. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that more than 29 million people in the U.S. live are living in a food desert.⁶ What's more, a recent multistate study found that low-income census tracts had half as many supermarkets as wealthy tracts.⁷ Work with your city and county planners to change local policies that increase access to healthy food options.

¹ CDC, Nutrition and the Health of Young People

² CDC, Nutrition and the Health of Young People

³ APHA online action to strengthen child nutrition programs

⁴ CDC, Addressing Obesity Disparities: <https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/state-local-programs/health-equity/index.html>

⁵ Center for Science in the Public Interest: <https://cspinet.org/sites/default/files/attachment/is-menu-labeling-working-factsheet.pdf>

⁶ USDA, Access to Affordable and Nutritious Food: www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/err143/33845_err143.pdf

⁷ http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/grocerygap.original.pdf

What can I do?

To start: You can **support local bills for taxing sugary drinks**. Sugary drinks alone may be responsible for at least one-fifth of the weight gained by Americans in the past three decades!⁸ Taxing these drinks can help reduce the consumption of sugar sweetened beverages and improve our health. In fact, a recent study found that after Berkeley, California, became the first jurisdiction to implement a sugar-sweetened beverage tax, consumption of such drinks dropped by 21 percent. In comparison, sugary beverage consumption went up 4 percent in the nearby cities of San Francisco and Oakland.⁹

Support healthy meals in schools

Let decision-makers know that you support federal rules that improved the healthfulness of school meals and led to kids eating more fruits and vegetables.¹⁰ [Watch APHA's webinar on smarter school lunchroom strategies](#) for ideas you can support in your local schools.

Learn from communities implementing nutrition programs across the country

APHA and the American Planning Association are building coalitions in 35 communities to improve access to health and nutrition. [Read their success stories](#).

Finally, there are many ways you can do in your own community to help overcome some of the food challenges we face — like starting a community garden or a Food Policy Council, volunteering at your local food bank, bringing fresh produce to local corner stores, supporting transportation improvements that expand access to farmers markets and grocery stores... and more! Some communities are even building their own food co-ops!¹¹

⁸ <http://publichealthlawcenter.org/topics/healthy-eating/sugar-sweetened-beverages>

⁹ American Journal of Public Health: <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303362>

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture: www.fns.usda.gov/pressrelease/2014/009814

¹¹ <http://billmoyers.com/2014/12/26/years-without-grocery-store-greensboro-neighbors-building-one-theyll/>



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