Teen Healthy Habits

April 2020
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PART 1:

Introduction & Methodology
The growing diversity of the U.S. requires a cultural responsiveness to disparate health outcomes. Different cultures have varying perceptions around health and nutrition, physical activity and the risks associated with obesity. Through funding from the Walmart Foundation, the National 4-H Council developed the 4-H Healthy Habits program to teach skills in nutrition and physical activity to underserved, disadvantaged youth and families. The 4-H Healthy Habits program uses a 4-pronged approach to strategically leverage the 4-H system to address food access, nutrition and health equity for underserved youth and families across the country.

Hypothesis
Teens are struggling to access healthy food for a variety of reasons (e.g., cost, lack of tasty options, lack of knowledge about nutrition) and it is negatively affecting their performance and confidence in school.

Research Objectives
• Provide proprietary, primary research that spotlights youth voice regarding healthy eating
• Identify areas of personal growth enabled by healthy eating
• Explore teen desire to participate in activities in community that will increase healthy eating
Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of 4-H from March 9 to March 16, 2020 with 1,501 respondents ages 13-19.

We also collected data on 4-H participation (n=348 4-Hers and n=1153 non 4-Hers).
Executive summary

• **Teens Face Impossible Healthy Food Choices:** Teens are having to MAKE impossible choices between health and money. More than a third (35%) say, “healthy food is not easily accessible to me,” while a majority (84%) say, “junk food is too accessible.”
  - Over a third of teens report hiding their hunger pains, saying they have had to stretch a meal (35%) and/or tried to hide their hunger from others (34%). Almost all teens (94%) report knowing someone who has had to choose unhealthy food options because they are cheaper or doing so themselves.
  - 68% of teens report they “often get by on snacks and junk food throughout the school day because it’s what’s most accessible in my school.” Over half of teens (56%) say they have lost focus in class due to hunger.
  - Most teens wish there were healthier food options in their community (74%) and at home (69%), while 1 in 4 reported having to drive 30 minutes to buy groceries (25%).

• **Gaps In Nutrition Education & Behavior:** Teens feel almost twice as knowledgeable about social media and video games than they do about nutrition, and they want schools to fill the information gap.
  - Most teens (66%) are spending more time deciding what they want to watch on Netflix and YouTube, than thinking about what they eat.
  - While 73% of teens feel confident they can make healthy choices, less than half (48%) follow through.
Executive summary (cont’d)

- **Healthy Food Is A Human Right & Priority For Teens**: Teens are calling for increased access and education around healthy food and they are looking to get involved in the solution.
  - Almost all teens believe “access to healthy food is a basic human right” (88%), and a majority want to learn how to cook and prepare healthier food for themselves (83%). For almost 3 in 4 teens (74%), their goal is to “eat healthier than my family or friends in the future.”
  - Teens are interested in being an active participants in solving the food crisis, as a majority said they would like to/or have donated money and/or volunteered within their communities.
  - Teens believe schools and supermarkets can help: 84% of teens say schools should teach students more about what makes food nutritious and over half believe supermarkets should incentivize health food choices through healthy grab & go options.

- **4-H Teens Are Especially Supportive & Proactive In Healthy Eating Choices**: 4-Hers are more likely to have ecosystems that encourage healthy eating, and their behaviors reflect it.
  - 54% of 4-Hers always or often make healthy food choices vs. 46% Non 4-Hers.
  - They are more likely to be in a more supportive community that encourages them to eat healthy (friends: 42% 4-Hers, vs 37% teens overall, teachers: 31% 4-Hers, vs 23% teens overall). They are also more likely to say they have influenced others to eat healthier, including their family (55% 4-Hers vs 50% teens overall), friends (49% 4-Hers vs 43% teens overall), and peers at school (28% 4-Hers vs 22% teens overall).
  - 4-Hers are much more involved in efforts to encourage healthy eating in their community compared to Non 4-Hers and over-index on all social actions, such as donating money, volunteering time, and petitioning.
PART 2:

State of Nutrition Today:

Gaps in access and knowledge are barriers to healthy habits
More than a third of teens say healthy food is not easily accessible

Teens see nutrition access as a societal issue at large, 42% say it’s not easily accessible to the average American and 35% believe it’s not easily accessible to their community.

How easy is it for the following people to access healthy food?

- **The average American**
  - Very Easy: 20%
  - Somewhat Easy: 37%
  - Somewhat Hard: 32%
  - Very Hard: 10%
  - 57% Easy
  - 42% Hard

- **People in your community**
  - Very Easy: 25%
  - Somewhat Easy: 40%
  - Somewhat Hard: 26%
  - Very Hard: 9%
  - 65% Easy
  - 35% Hard

**35%**

“Healthy food is not easily accessible to me.”
The vast majority (83%) of teens say junk food is too accessible today (89% rural teens)

The majority of teens wish there were healthier food options in their community (74%) and at home (69%)

How often do you get food and how healthy is it in the following places?

- **Freq of Eating Here**
- **Healthiness of Food**

- At home: 92% (Freq), 73% (Healthiness)
- At school: 55% (Freq), 64% (Healthiness)
- At extended families' houses: 52% (Freq), 68% (Healthiness)
- At friends' houses: 48% (Freq), 54% (Healthiness)
- Extracurricular activities: 27% (Freq), 56% (Healthiness)
- After school job: 26% (Freq), 53% (Healthiness)
- Community or church events: 26% (Freq), 64% (Healthiness)
- After school programs: 24% (Freq), 61% (Healthiness)
- Before school programs: 20% (Freq), 64% (Healthiness)
- Food banks: 19% (Freq), 71% (Healthiness)
- A Backpack Program: 17% (Freq), 70% (Healthiness)

34% “I want to eat healthier, but my friends or family don’t support my efforts.”
Nearly half have been forced to make unhealthy food choices to save money

Over a third of teens report having had to hide their hunger pains, saying they have had to stretch a meal (35%) and/or tried to hide their hunger from others (34%)

Have you or someone you know ever experienced any of the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Me</th>
<th>Someone I Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Had to choose unhealthy food options because they are cheaper</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received free reduced lunch</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to stretch a meal</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used EBT/SNAP/food stamps in order to buy food</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried to hide hunger from others</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to visit a food pantry to get food</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not afford lunch at school</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to drive more than 30 minutes to buy groceries</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to choose a living expense over food</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Over half of teens say they have lost focus in class due to hunger

Many also rely on junk food to fuel them during the school day because it is what’s available

Have any of the following ever happened to you because you were hungry?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I did not focus in class</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt sick</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not do my best in extracurricular activities</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I made a silly mistake on a test or quiz</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I skipped class to go get food</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I missed an important announcement</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“68% ‘I often get by on snacks and junk food throughout the school day because it's what's most accessible in my school.’
**STATE OF NUTRITION TODAY**

Teens believe access to balanced nutrition can empower academic performance

Most agree healthy foods are essential to productivity at school

Which of the following, if any, are true for you when you've eaten a well-balanced lunch at school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel energized</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easier to stay focused/study</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I perform better in class</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51% 4-Hers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel ready to learn</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like the best version of myself</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

84%

“Having a balanced diet is important to do well at school.”
91% 13-14

82%

“It is important to have a balanced diet when it comes to your ability to stay focused, productive, etc.”
Teens are almost twice as knowledgeable about social media and video games, than they are about nutrition

Most are spending more time on their streaming decisions than their diet, and the same amount partake in mindless eating

Overall, what do you feel most knowledgeable about?

- Social media: 37%
- Video games: 24% (33% 13-14)
- Nutrition: 14% (19% 4-Hers)
- Sports: 11%
- Celebrities: 6%
- None of these: 8%

66%

“I take longer to pick what I watch on Netflix or YouTube than I do thinking about what I eat.”

66%

“I often find myself eating without thinking about what I’m eating.”
39% of teen girls feel pressured by social media to eat a certain way

And it’s not a good thing, as less than a third of teens say influencers on social media have encouraged them to eat healthier (27%).

When you feel pressure to eat a certain way to fit in, where does it usually come from?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From my family</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From my friends</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media/entertainment</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From celebrities/influencers</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery stores</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instagram and social media influencers are one of the least trusted sources when it comes to making healthy food decisions (19%), compared to doctors (67%), family (63%), and even other places on the Internet (36%).
Teens’ confidence in making healthy choices falls short of healthy behaviors

While 73% of teens feel confident they can make healthy choices, less than half (49%) follow through.

How confident do you feel in your ability to make healthy food choices?

- Very Confident: 22%
- Somewhat Confident: 51%
- Somewhat Unconfident: 20%
- Very Unconfident: 7%

73% Confident

How often do you make healthy food choices?

- Always: 9%
- Often: 39%
- Sometimes: 49%
- Never: 3%

48% Frequently

54% 4-Hers vs 46% Non 4-Hers
Teens are focused on calories, sugar and freshness as indicators of healthy food

85% say they “know what a healthy meal should include,” but their criteria for what is healthy varies
The barriers for teens and healthy food come down to perceived taste, time, and money.

In your day-to-day life, what are the biggest reasons you don’t choose healthy food?

- **46%** Lack of tasty healthy options
- **38%** Lack of time
- **37%** Lack of affordable healthy options
- **19%** Lack of knowledge of what is healthy
- **27%** Lack of portability
- **25%** Lack of access

“I think I would eat healthier food if it tasted better.”

- **80%** 13-14
- **80%** Rural
PART 3:

Food the the future:

Teens are calling for equal nutrition for all
Teens call for equal nutrition access for all, as a basic human right

Teens are also making it a personal priority

88% “Access to healthy food is a basic human right.”

84% “Providing nutritious meals for all should be a priority.”

83% “I want to learn how to cook and prepare healthier food for myself.”

74% “My goal is to eat healthier than my family or friends in the future.”
Schools are pivotal to this process, with the ability to improve both access and education

84%
“Schools should teach students more about what makes food nutritious.”

84%
“All students in America should have the same access to high quality healthy food.”

83%
“Public schools should provide free high quality, healthy meals for their students.”

89% Rural
Teens believe supermarkets can help through to-go and budget-friendly options

The top way to help incentivize healthier choices is by bolstering convenient nutritious offerings, followed by offering coupons and discounts.

What would be helpful for supermarkets to do to help you/your family make healthy choices?

- **55%** Quick grab & go healthy options
- **52%** Coupons that encourage healthy eating
- **49%** Discounts on organic for students & family
- **39%** Mobile app to help shop by nutritional need
- **31%** Posters with more info about food
- **31%** Cooking classes for healthy meals
- **30%** Aisle displays with health meal instructions
- **26%** Access to community garden
- **20%** Guided tour that shows healthy food options

74% “I would eat healthier if I had more time to cook or eat healthy on the go.”
TEENS ARE CALLING FOR EQUAL NUTRITION FOR ALL

Over half of teens want more guidance on food budgeting and community integration

Many would also like their schools to bridge them with the local food communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Want provided</th>
<th>Is provided</th>
<th>Net:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guidance on how to develop a food / grocery budget</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrations with local food community</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy cooking lessons in classes like Home Ec/Consumer Science</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-depth education on nutrition and high-quality healthy food</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best practices when it comes to exercise / active living</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less expensive meals to students who cannot afford them</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It’s not all bad on social media: 66% feel inspired by those they see on social media who are into healthy living.
**TEENS ARE CALLING FOR EQUAL NUTRITION FOR ALL**

Teens are interested in being an active participant in solving the food crisis

Most are willing to donate, volunteer or teach health-driven community programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would do</th>
<th>Donate money to a charity that provides healthy food</th>
<th>Volunteer at a community garden</th>
<th>Participate in a community program that teaches healthy habits</th>
<th>Sign a petition for new legislation</th>
<th>Volunteer to cook in your school cafeteria</th>
<th>Join a march or protest</th>
<th>Contact your local government official</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have done/do</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net:</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are you currently doing or would you do any of the following to help others have access to healthy food?
4-Hers are more likely to have already become active in the fight for accessible, healthy food

1 in 3 have donated to healthy food charities, while 1 in 4 have volunteered at a community garden

Are you currently doing any of the following to help others have access to healthy food? (% Have Done/Do)

- Donate money to a charity that provides healthy food
- Volunteer at a community garden
- Sign a petition for new legislation
- Join a march or protest
- Participate in a community program that teaches healthy habits
- Volunteer to cook in your school cafeteria
- Contact your local government official

4-Her vs. Non 4-Her:

- Donate money to a charity: 31% (4-Her) vs. 18% (Non 4-Her)
- Volunteer at a community garden: 25% (4-Her) vs. 15% (Non 4-Her)
- Sign a petition: 21% (4-Her) vs. 12% (Non 4-Her)
- Join a march or protest: 21% (4-Her) vs. 11% (Non 4-Her)
- Participate in a community program: 20% (4-Her) vs. 13% (Non 4-Her)
- Volunteer to cook: 19% (4-Her) vs. 9% (Non 4-Her)
- Contact local government official: 17% (4-Her) vs. 10% (Non 4-Her)
And teens can create a groundswell of influence across families and communities

Half of teens have felt they were able to influence healthy eating within their family and 4-Hers are especially influential across their networks.

Who, if anyone, do you feel you have influenced to eat healthier?

- Family members: 50%
- Friends: 43%
- Peers at school: 22%
- Members of your community: 13%
- Your followers on social media: 12%
- Other: 5%
- None: 22%
PART 4: Appendix
On average, Teens are eating about 5 times a day

2.4 Average number of meals in a day

2.8 Average number of snacks
Teens say their families shop at grocery stores most frequently, though a majority also rely on convenience stores monthly or more.

How often do your parents/family shop at the following places?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Daily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grocery store</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery delivery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience store</td>
<td></td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers market</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2% never shop at grocery stores. 17% shop monthly, 64% weekly, and 15% daily.
More than a third of Teens say less than 50% of what they eat is healthy

On an average day, how much of what you eat would you classify as "healthy" versus "unhealthy"?

- Less than 25%: 6%
- 25%-49%: 30%
- 50%-74%: 43%
- 75%-100%: 22%
Teens are encouraged primarily by family and doctors to make healthy food decisions.

Who in your life encourages you to eat healthy?

- Family: 65%
- Doctors/Medical Professionals: 42%
- Influencers you follow on social media: 37%
- Teachers, School Staff, Counselors: 23%
- TV shows/documentaries: 17%
- Other: 5%
- No one encourages me to eat healthy: 8%