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Nutrition

First insights from the menuCH-Kids study

How children and
adolescents in Switzerland
eat, move, and live

menuCH
 KIDS



Key takeaways

For the first time, Switzerland has a comprehensive national overview of the diets of children and adolescents. This achievement is the result of the menuCH-Kids survey, a nationwide study that reveals who eats what, how much, when and where, as well as additional data on health and lifestyles.

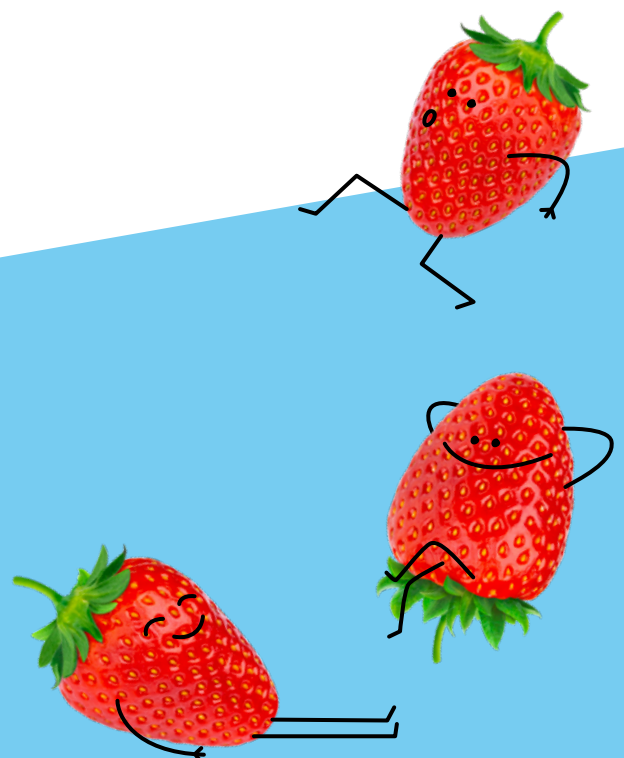
The survey is further enriched with biomarker data using blood and urine samples, providing objective insights into nutritional status and health risks. The menuCH-Kids survey provides robust, Swiss-specific evidence allowing to inform public health initiatives and national strategies. It empowers health professionals and policymakers to support young people in growing up healthy and thriving in a supportive environment. The survey also enables to answer questions from a wide range of stakeholders, including political representatives, media, and general public.

The results show many positive aspects about our country's youth. For example, most children's diets provide appropriate energy, breakfast remains common, and risk factors for chronic diseases are relatively low

compared to other countries. On the other side, about 13% are overweight or obese. There are areas for improvement in the diet, such as low fruit and vegetables intake, high protein intake and meat consumption, frequent consumption of snacks and sugary drinks, and insufficient physical activity in many age groups.

A minority of the Swiss youth eat regularly alone or in front of a screen, and a small percentage have a blood value indicating an increased diabetes risk factor.

This evidence base allows Switzerland to develop age-appropriate nutrition recommendations tailored to its own population – rather than relying on foreign data. It also helps shape food safety policies based on real Swiss eating habits and lifestyles. Risk assessments for food contaminants (e.g., heavy metals) will be well-grounded on Swiss dietary patterns and biosamples. The dataset will support research of important and emerging topics (such as ultra-processed foods and sugary drinks consumption, or obesity, nutrient deficiencies, and other diet-related health issues).



Why nutrition matters

Nutrition is essential for health and wellbeing throughout life. A balanced diet provides the nutrients needed for growth, development, and to stay as healthy as possible.

Fruit and vegetables are important sources of vitamins, minerals, dietary fibre, and many other beneficial nutrients. Milk and dairy products, together with water, nuts and seeds, contribute to calcium intake, especially promoting strong bones. Daily consumption of whole grains support fibre intake and satiety. Unsalted, unsweetened nuts and seeds pro-

vide healthy fatty acids such as omega-3. Proteins of varied sources are essential but should be consumed in appropriate amounts.

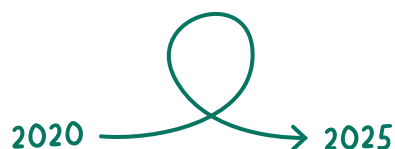
Foods high in salt, sugar, or unhealthy fats — such as fast food, salty snacks, sweet products, and sugary drinks — are non-essential and should be enjoyed in moderation. High consumption of salt and sugar is linked to non-communicable diseases later in life. Limiting sugary drinks is especially important, as they offer energy without nutrients and contribute to tooth decay.



About the study

Eating habits formed in childhood and adolescence influence current and future health. Until now, Switzerland lacked nationwide data on children's nutrition. To gather Swiss-specific knowledge, menuCH-Kids was launched:

Project duration:



Data collection: Pilot in spring 2023, main phase 2023–2024 over one year to represent season variations

Where: Six study centres in the three main linguistic regions (Bellinzona, Bern, Lausanne, Lucerne, St Gallen, Zurich)

Who participated: 1'852 of the randomly invited children and adolescents aged 6–17 years, with roughly equal numbers of girls (51%) and boys (49%). The majority of parents were Swiss nationality (both parents Swiss = 53%, one parent Swiss = 25%, both parents non Swiss = 22%)

What was done: Dietary interviews about what was eaten in the last 24h (twice per participant), lifestyle questionnaires, physical measurements (body weight, height, waist and hip circumference, blood pressure), and urine and blood samples.



QUESTIONNAIRE

Reporting

- Frequency of food intake
- Dietary habits
- Perceptions about diet and health
- Supplement intake
- Barriers to a healthy diet
- Allergies
- Lifestyle habits
- Physical activity



DIETARY INTERVIEW

Reporting

- Detailed description of food consumed
- Food quantities



PHYSICAL MEASUREMENTS

Measuring

- Weight
- Height
- Waist and hip circumference
- Blood pressure



BIOSAMPLES

Measuring

- Laboratory values of blood and urine



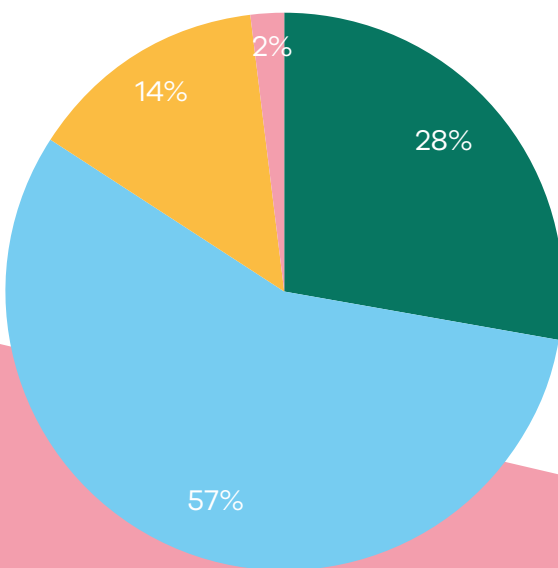
Results at a glance

Nutrition

Most parents (around 85%) think their children eat a fairly balanced diet. Adolescents themselves are slightly less positive about their own diet; around 75% think they eat healthfully.

Knowledge of healthy eating was rarely mentioned as a barrier to eating a healthy diet (4%) – families know what they should eat, but they often lack the resources to do so. Parents reported that the main barriers to healthier eating were time pressure (17%) and, for some, costs of healthy food (7%).

How balanced parents consider their child's diet [%]



- Balanced
- Fairly balanced
- Fairly unbalanced
- Unbalanced



Diet

Diet was assessed in two ways. First, a questionnaire collected the frequency at which different food groups are consumed (over the last month). Then two dietary interviews were conducted to record in detail every food they ate and drank in the previous 24 hours and to estimate the quantities consumed. The following are selected notable results:

Whole-grain: Overall, whole-grain starchy food is eaten on a daily basis by only 8%.

Unsalted and unsweetened nuts and seeds are consumed daily by only 2%.

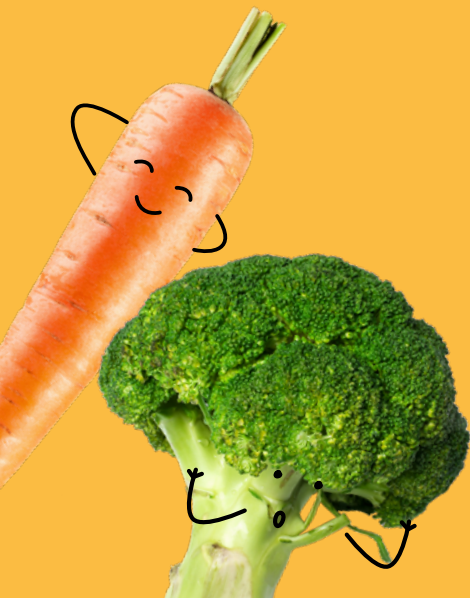
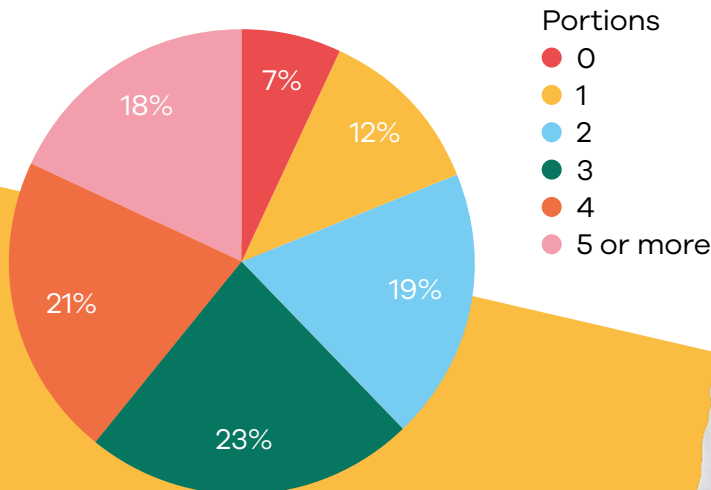
Fruit and vegetables: Only 18% of young people report reaching the recommended "five fruits and vegetables a day". The recommendation is more commonly reached in French-speaking Switzerland.

Mean intakes over the population are ~140g/day for fruit, as well as for vegetables. With growing age, the consumption of vegetables increases, and fruit consumption decreases. A small-sized apple or a medium-sized tomato corresponds to around 140g.

Dairy: Milk is consumed daily by one-third, with 9% eating cheese every day. Adolescent girls consume less often milk than younger children. Plant-based dairy alternatives remain uncommon.

Mean consumption of dairy is 205g/day, including 136g of milk/day (a small glass of milk), 36g/day of cheese, (which corresponds to about the size of a fish-finger stick), and 33g/day of yogurt (about 2 flat soup spoons). Dairy consumption is higher in boys, with a marked increase for older boys.

Distribution of persons according to their daily fruit and vegetable consumption [%]

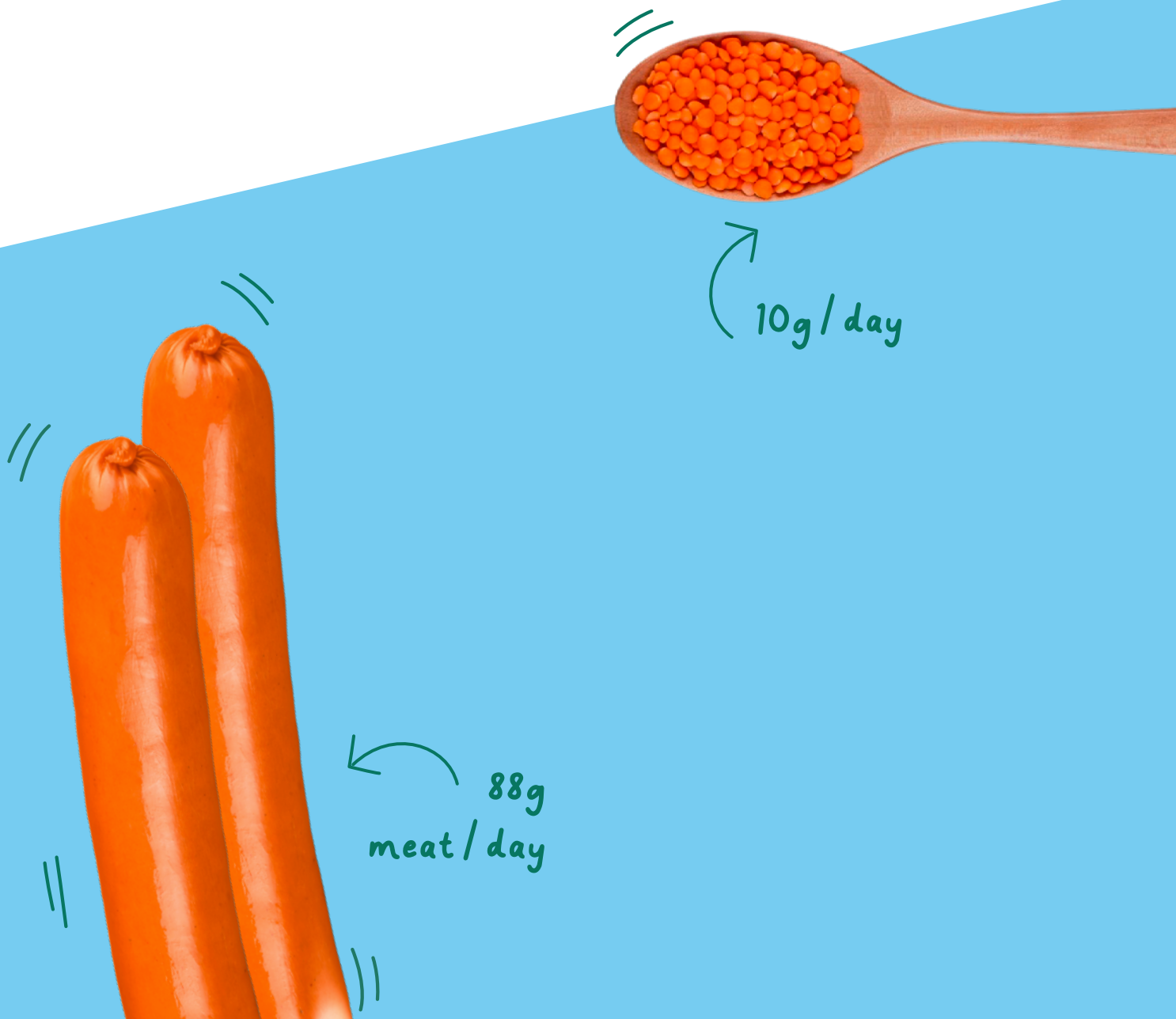


Meat: 85% of young people reported eating unprocessed meat (steak, poultry breast, etc.) more than once a week, with 9% eating it daily. Processed meat (sausages, ham, etc.) is also commonly consumed (eaten weekly by 67% and daily by 4%). Adolescent boys report a higher frequency of meat consumption (daily consumption of unprocessed meat 22% and processed meat 7%). Adolescent girls eat less frequently processed meat.

Mean meat consumption is around 88g/day, including almost half of processed meat (37g/day). 88g corresponds to nearly the weight of 2 hot dog sausages. Consumption increases with age and is higher for boys (peak consumption of older boys of 135g/day, which corresponds to the weight of around 1.5 cooked burger patties).

Fish and pulses are eaten less often (weekly consumption of fish 23% and pulses 20%). Adolescent girls eat more frequently pulses and plant-based substitutes. German-speaking population reports eating less fish, while the Italian-speaking population more frequently eats seafood and pulses. The French-speaking population showed a slightly higher frequency of unprocessed meat consumption and fewer plant-based substitutes.

Mean consumption is around 10g/day for both pulses and fish. (One small soup spoon of cooked lentils corresponds to around 10g).



Snacks and fast foods: Chocolate is the most frequent snack (eaten by 75% at least weekly, 12% daily), followed by salty snacks, sweets, and pastries (consumed weekly by half of the youth). Fast foods (like hot dogs and french fries) are consumed by 21% weekly, and more by older males, but almost never daily. Adolescents eat less frequently chocolate and candy but more pastries and fast food than younger children. German-speaking participants consume more snacks overall.

Mean consumption of sugary foods and desserts is approximately 95g/day (nearly the weight of a standard chocolate bar), and the mean consumption of salty snacks is about 16g/day (corresponds to the weight of around 1.5 soup spoons of salty peanuts).

Sweet drinks: Almost half of Swiss youth consume sweet drinks weekly, especially older boys (over 70% drink them weekly), and 3% of all drink them daily. Energy and sports drinks are less frequent, but the frequency of consumption increases with age, especially for older boys.

Mean consumption is 1.5L/day of all beverages, including 1L water, but also 170ml soda per day and 75mL fruit juices per day. These two types of sugary drinks together correspond to the volume of about 1 energy drink can. Total beverage consumption per day increases with age (from 1L to 2L), and sweet beverages follow the same trend, with a higher intake for boys; fruit juice consumption is quite stable over age groups.



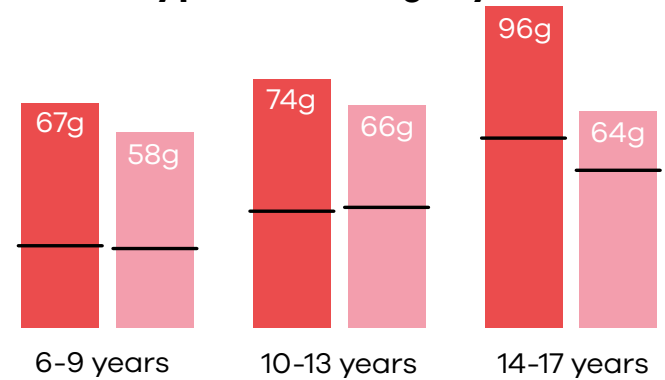
Macronutrients and total energy

In addition to quantities consumed, the two detailed dietary interviews (24h-recalls) also provide information about diet composition*:

- > **The daily energy** intake is close to the respective age and sex specific reference values. The overall mean energy intake of 6-17-year-olds is 1968 kcal/day. In adolescent girls, the mean intake of 1826 kcal/day is lower than the reference value (2228-2277 kcal/day).
- > **The fibres and carbohydrates** intakes are within the reference range (Fibres: 16-21g/day; Carbohydrate 45%-65% of the total energy intake).

- > **The fats** consumption of 35% to 37% of the total energy intake is towards the upper limit (reference value: 20% to 35% of total energy intake).
- > **The protein** intake in all groups exceeds age and sex-specific reference values ranging between 25-54g/day, with actual consumption from 58 to 96g per day, indicating that Swiss youth consume approximately twice the recommended amount of protein. Adolescent boys show the highest mean intake at 96g/day.

Mean daily protein intake [g/day]



- Boys mean protein intake (g/day)
- Girls mean protein intake (g/day)
- Upper daily recommendation



* Recommendations based on the Swiss dietary references values of the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (2025)

Dietary habits

Breakfast: About 70% reported eating breakfast every day. Younger children (6–9 years: 84%) are the most regular breakfast eaters, while a quarter of adolescents reported always skipping it. Overall, around 20% of the Swiss youth rarely eat breakfast with an adult present, rising to half of adolescents.

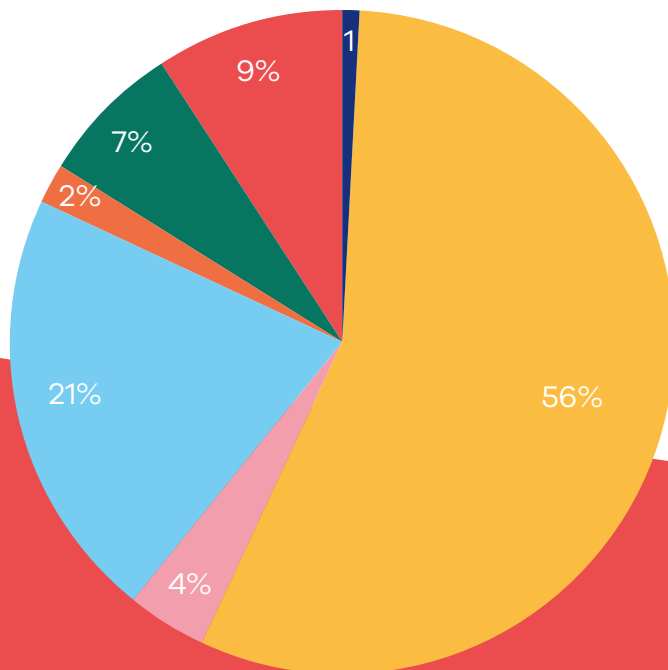
Lunch: Concerning lunch meals, 60% of the weekday meals were reported to be eaten at home, 23% at school, and 9% brought a packed lunch. However, 7% of the weekday lunches were eaten out, and for older adolescents, it rises to 16%.

Dinner: The evening meals remain the most family-oriented meal, with 76% reporting eating it daily with adults.

Special diets

- > 12% reported avoiding certain foods due to allergies or intolerances; about 40% of these cases are medically confirmed.
- > A minority reported following a vegetarian (4.4%) or a vegan (1%) diet. These are more common among girls (6.4% vegetarian, 1.3% vegan) than boys (2.6% vegetarian, 0.8% vegan).

Distribution of lunch locations during the week [%]



- At home (your house or that of a close relative)
- at someone else's house
- at the school canteen (e.g.: school meals)
- during cookery lessons at school
- by eating out (something purchased from a take-away, a restaurant, supermarket, baker's, fast food outlet or food truck)
- by eating a packed lunch brought from home
- other

Health factors

General health: Over 90% of parents consider their child to be healthy. Adolescents rate themselves slightly less healthy (around 80%). One-third of the youth report stress and difficulties sleeping at least several times a month.

Body weight: According to measurements, about 76% of youth have a healthy body weight. While 7% are overweight, 6% are obese, and 11% are underweight. Overweight increases with age and is generally slightly higher in girls than in boys. On the contrary, obesity is similar between boys and girls and is slightly lower in adolescents. Overweight and obesity together are slightly more common in French- and Italian-speaking Switzerland.

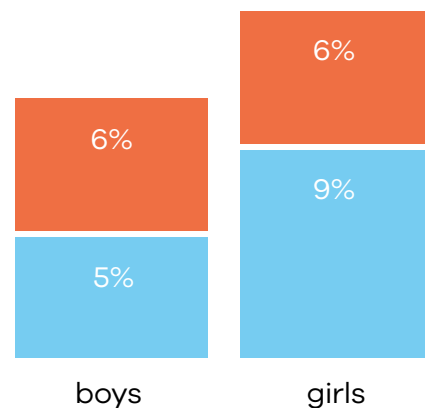
Parents' perceptions are broadly accurate in assessing their children's weight status. Adolescents tend to be slightly more self-critical: boys more often perceive themselves as 'slightly too thin' and females as 'overweight'. About 9% of both boys and girls report having followed a weight loss diet in the last year.

Biomarkers provide objective information about risk factors for non-communicable diseases in Swiss youth:

- > 10% show signs of increased diabetes risk (increased glycated haemoglobin).
- > 9% have a high total-cholesterol value.
- > 7% show markers of iron deficiency (low ferritin).
- > 5% have vitamin B12 deficiency.
- > 5% have vitamin D deficiency, and 27% an insufficiency.

Supplements: Around 25% took dietary supplements in the previous month, especially vitamins and minerals.

Share of persons who are overweight or obese [%]



- obese
- overweight



Lifestyle

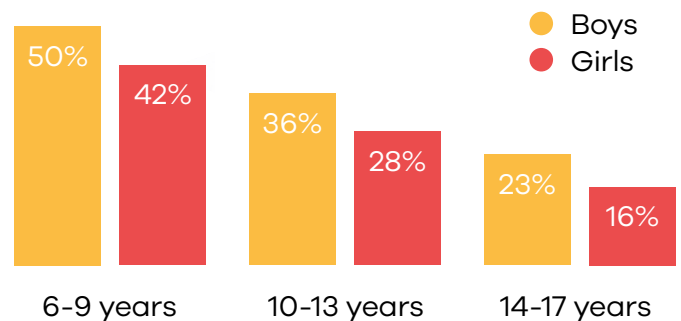
Physical activity: Adherence to WHO recommendations (≥ 1 hour every day) decreases with age and is consistently lower among girls: among 6–9-year-olds, 42% of girls and 50% of boys meet the recommendation, while among 14–17-year-olds, only 16% of girls and 23% of boys do. When assessing the activities during the day, sport class and sport outside of school each represent one third of the “moving” time, followed by commuting to school and school breaks.

Screen time: Youth spend an average of 3.1 hours per day in front of a screen, rising above 4 hours for adolescents (especially for girls) and decreasing below 2 hours for younger children. Under 3% always eat in front of the screen and less than 10% regularly eat in front of a screen. Adolescents eat more in front of a screen: up to 17% of adolescent boys at breakfast and 15% at lunch.

Sleep: Younger children reported to usually sleep about 10 hours per night; adolescents sleep about 8 hours on weekdays and 10 hours on weekends.

Substance use: Most adolescents reported to not smoke (88%), 5% do so weekly, including less than 3% daily. Around one third reported to usually drink alcohol (including beer, wine, and strong alcohol) a few times per month, and 5% weekly.

Persons meeting WHO physical activity guidelines (≥ 1 hour/day) [%]



The Survey was developed and funded by the **Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office** (FSVO) and its implementation was conducted together with a consortium across Switzerland under the lead of **Unisanté** – (Lausanne) together with **Berner Fachhochschule** (Bern), **Inselspital Kinderklinik** (Bern), **Università della Svizzera italiana** (Lugano), **Ospedale Regionale di Bellinzona** (Bellinzona), **Universität Zürich** (Zurich), **Ostschweizer Kinderspital** (St Gallen), **Kinderspital Zentralschweiz** (Lucerne), **Zürcher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften** (Winterthur), **Haute école spécialisée de Suisse occidentale** (Geneva), **Swiss Nutrition and Health Foundation** (Lausanne), **YouGov Schweiz** (Lucerne)

Detailed Information and values as well as further endpoints can be found in the survey report **“national nutrition survey in children and adolescent menuCH-Kids – report”**



Impressum

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Publication date: November 2025

Language versions: This publication is available in German, French, Italian and English.

Digital version: All language versions of this publication are available as PDF files on the webpage menuchkids.ch.

Image credits: Vaud and Bern menuCH-Kids teams (Unisanté /BFH)

Design: BOLD AG, Bern