

Research Rundown

Article

Association of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act With Dietary Quality Among Children in the US National School Lunch Program

What did this study examine?

This serial cross-sectional study examined the association between the **Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act** (HHFKA) and dietary quality (DQ) of lunch among students participating in the **National School Lunch Program** (NSLP) prior to the 2018 policy alteration. The HHFKA called for specific changes to the NSLP that included:

- requiring fruits and vegetables as two separate components;
- reducing the amount of starchy vegetables served weekly;
- requiring students to select a fruit or vegetable with every meal;
- increasing the amount of whole-grain rich grains required;
- offering fat-free milk;
- setting allowable sodium limits; and
- banning trans-fat from meals

What participants were assessed?

Age groups included were 5 to 18, in kindergarten through 12th grade, and enrolled in a school that participated in the NSLP. Outcomes organized by low-income, low-middle income, and middle-high income were reported.

How was the Healthy Eating Index-2010 quantified?

A scale of 0-100; 0 indicates a diet with no adherence to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and 100 indicates a diet with complete adherence to the guidelines.

How was dietary quality examined?

Dietary quality was examined through the Healthy Eating Index- 2010 (HEI-2010) measurement score. The USDA Food Patterns Equivalents Database converted nutrient composition into food patterns equivalent component quantities.

Key Findings:

The primary results of the study indicated that there are **significantly positive differences in dietary quality** of lunch for NSLP low-income, low-middle income, and middle-high income participants compared to nonparticipants post policy implementation.

- **The participants in this study reported an increase in consumption of greens, grains, and beans.**
- **Also, there was a reported increase in refined grains moderation, resulting in a decrease in refined grains consumption.**

Secondary outcomes for this study indicate that reported HEI-2010 scores show that the **mean scores of greens, grains, and beans increased** after HHFKA policy implementation compared to pre-policy.

- **HEI-2010 lunch scores showed an increase of 12.6 points in low-income participants, 12.4 points in low-middle income participants and 8.1 points in middle-high income participants.**
- **As a result, the overall score exemplifies significant differences of the consumption of specific foods and nutrients.**

Put it into practice!

- Take your menu to the next level and go above and beyond current requirements by serving ALL whole grain-rich items, and limiting the prevalence of flavored milk in your menus.
- Boost your school lunch and breakfast programs by serving a variety of fruits and vegetables at each meal service.
- Advertise the nutritional quality of your breakfast and lunch meals to your parents to encourage meal participation.
- Highlight the unique ways in which your program has met the nutritional requirements of the HHFKA while also satisfying specific meal pattern requirements!

Reference:

Kinderknecht K, Harris C, Jones-Smith J. Association of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act With Dietary Quality Among Children in the US National School Lunch Program. JAMA. 2020;324(4):359-368. doi:10.1001/jama.2020.9517



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