

## 2. NON-MEDICAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

### 2.3. Fruit and vegetable consumption among children

Nutrition is important for children's development and long-term health. Eating fruit during adolescence, for example in place of foods high in fat, sugar and salt, can protect against health problems such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases. Moreover, eating fruit and vegetables when young can be habit forming, promoting healthy eating in adult life.

A number of factors influence the amount of fruit consumed by adolescents, including family income, the cost of alternatives, preparation time, whether parents eat fruit, and the availability of fresh fruit which can be linked to the country or local climate (Rasmussen et al., 2006). Fruit consumption and vegetable consumption have a high priority as indicators of healthy eating in most OECD countries.

Overall, boys in Canada, Denmark and Portugal, and girls in Denmark, Norway and Canada had the highest rates of daily fruit consumption, while consumption was relatively low in Poland, Sweden, Estonia, and Finland, with rates of around one in four for girls and one in five, or even less, for boys (Figure 2.3.1). In all countries, girls were more likely than boys to eat fruit daily. The gap between the fruit consumption of boys and girls was especially large in Denmark, where 56% of girls, but only 34% of boys reported eating fruit each day. Norway and Germany also had large differences.

Daily vegetable eating was reported by around one in three girls and one in four boys on average across OECD member states in 2009-10 (Figure 2.3.2). Girls in Belgium most commonly ate vegetables daily (60%), followed by Denmark, France, Canada and Switzerland (45-50%). Belgium also led the way for boys (46%), with close to 40% in France, Canada and Ireland. Eating vegetables daily was less common in Austria, Estonia and Spain, as well as in Hungary (girls), and Finland (boys).

Average reported rates of daily vegetable consumption across OECD countries showed some increase between 2001-02 and 2009-10, for both girls and boys (Figure 2.3.3). The largest increases (above 10%) are observed in Denmark and Greece (in both genders), and in Norway and Spain (in girls only). For fruit consumption, trends show on average a small increase over the past decade among boys and girls. Rates have grown by 10% or more in Canada, Denmark, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States, whereas they have fallen in Poland and in Germany (in boys only).

Effective and targeted strategies are required to ensure that children are eating enough fruit and vegetables to conform to recommended national dietary guidelines. A European study found that schoolchildren generally hold a positive attitude toward fruit intake, and report good availability of fruit at home, but a lesser availability at school and during leisure time. Improved access to fruit and vegetables, combined with educational and motivational activities may help to increase consumption (Sandvik et al., 2005).

#### **Definition and comparability**

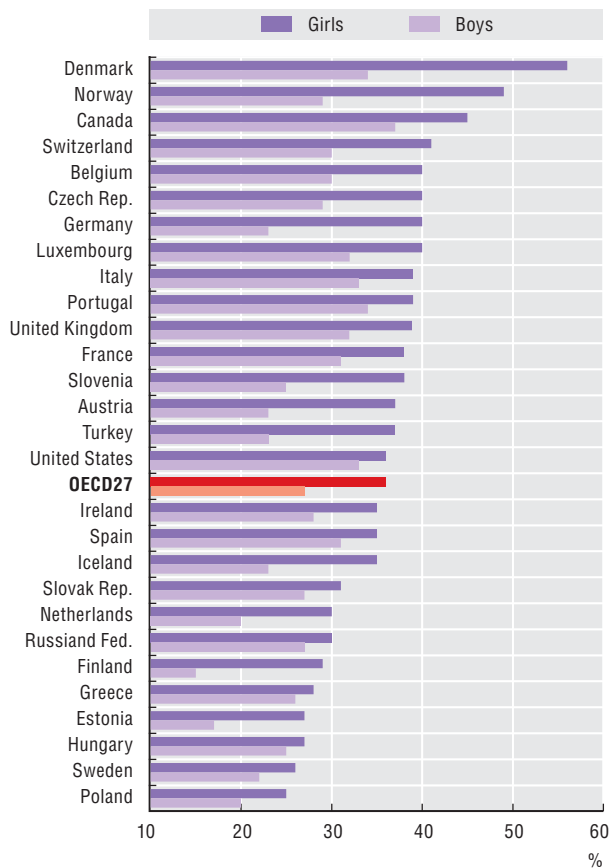
Dietary habits are measured here in terms of the proportions of children who report eating fruit and vegetables at least every day or more than once a day. In addition to fruit and vegetables, healthy nutrition also involves other types of foods.

Data are from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) surveys. They are drawn from school-based samples of 1 500 in each age group (11-, 13- and 15-year-olds) in most countries.

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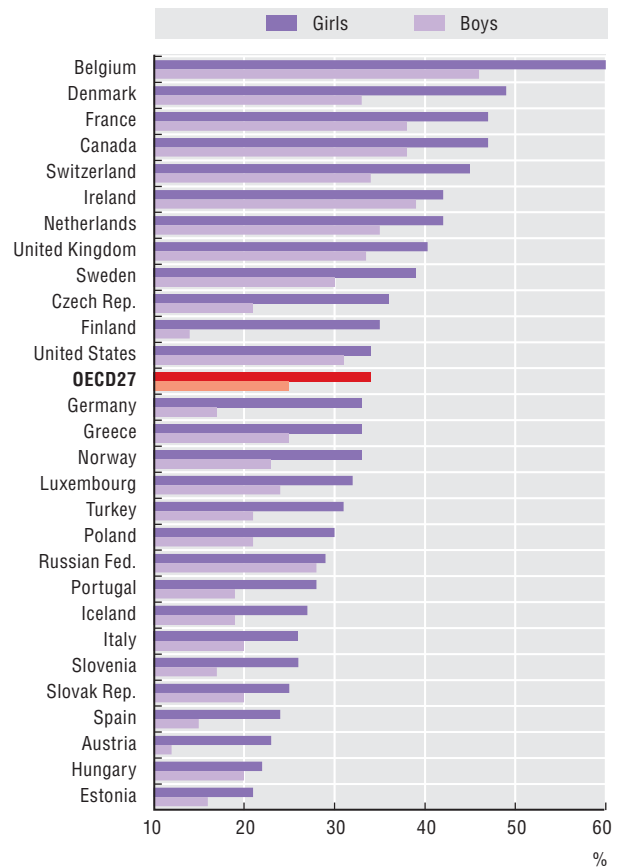
#### 2.3.1. Daily fruit eating among 15-year-olds, 2009-10



Source: Currie, C. et al. (2012).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932916515>

#### 2.3.2. Daily vegetable eating among 15-year-olds, 2009-10



Source: Currie, C. et al. (2012).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932916534>

#### 2.3.3. Trends in daily fruit and vegetable eating among 15-year-olds, 27 OECD countries, 2001-02 to 2009-10



Source: Currie et al. (2004); Currie et al. (2008); Currie et al. (2012).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932916553>



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