

Year 7 Health Check 2020 survey results



ACT
Government

ACT Health

A health snapshot of Year 7 students in the ACT

Summary of Findings

The Year 7 Health Check (Y7HC) survey was implemented in full for the first time between August and September 2020, collecting self-reported data on healthy weight and related risk factors such as diet, physical activity and emotional wellbeing from 1,919 Year 7 students in 31 of the ACT's government, Catholic and independent high schools.

Findings from the Y7HC survey indicate areas where Year 7 students met health recommendations and where there is room for improvement.

Most students met the recommended fruit intake and minimised their consumption of discretionary food and drinks to not more than twice weekly.

Less than half of the students met the recommended: vegetable intake; levels of physical activity; and hours of sleep; and, around one fifth of students rated their health as either fair or poor.

While some differences were seen between boys and girls, on the whole the survey results applied equally to girls and boys.

Further information on the 2020 Y7HC survey is available from the [Year 7 Health Check survey page \(Year 7 Health Check survey | Health \(act.gov.au\)\)](#) or [HealthStats page \(HealthStats | Health \(act.gov.au\)\)](#)

The Year 7 Health Check survey

Following a successful trial in 2019, the Year 7 Health Check (Y7HC) survey was implemented in full for the first time in 2020 and will be an annual survey of Year 7 students attending ACT high schools. The survey is managed by the ACT Health Directorate and complements the ACT Government's current collection of health and wellbeing information by detecting preventive health risks early in the ACT's adolescent population. The survey forms part of the ACT Government's commitment to improving the health of young people. It is intended that findings from the Y7HC survey will be used to inform, develop and expand population-based health and wellbeing programs.



How the survey was implemented

Implementation of the 2020 Y7HC survey was managed by the ACT Health Directorate, facilitated and administered by the ACT Education Directorate, and in non-government schools the survey was implemented with in principle support from the Association of Independent Schools of the ACT and Catholic Education (Archdioceses of Canberra and Goulburn). The survey was available to complete online and open to Year 7 students between 10 August 2020 and 4 September 2020.

All Year 7 students attending ACT high schools and able to complete a self-administered survey were eligible to participate in the Y7HC survey. Some specialist schools were not included as the health challenges of specific groups of children with special needs is beyond the scope of a population level surveillance tool such as the Y7HC survey. Students who did not wish to participate were able to opt-out. In ACT government schools the survey was implemented in class as part of the ACT Education Directorate's annual School Satisfaction and Climate Survey process while in non-government schools a weblink was provided to students to complete the survey online either within or outside the classroom setting.

The Y7HC survey covered questions on: diet, including consumption of fruit and vegetables, discretionary foods such as 'fast' foods, snacks high in fat, sugar or salt, and sugar sweetened drinks; and questions on levels of physical activity, sedentary behaviour, active travel to and from school, sleep and general wellbeing. Completion of the survey was estimated to take up to 20 minutes.

In February 2020, 5,743 Year 7 students were enrolled across 42 government and non-government high schools in the ACT of which 5,704 students were eligible to participate in the Y7HC survey¹. Of those students who were eligible to participate, 2,597 (45.5%) were provided with the Y7HC survey weblink either through their school's participation in the annual School Satisfaction and Climate Survey, or the survey weblink was provided to them separately if they attended a non-government school which had elected to participate in the survey.



Survey respondents

At the close of the survey period,

1,919

Year 7 students

from 31 of 39 eligible government and non-government high schools in the ACT had participated in the 2020 Y7HC survey.

With varying levels of school participation, the overall survey response rate was 34% of all eligible students.

- More of the participating students were male (54%) than female (45%), and the remaining 1% identified as being of 'Other' gender or did not respond to a question on gender. Subsequently, exploration of survey responses by gender was limited to male and female respondents as the sample size for 'Other' or non-respondents for gender was too small to permit any meaningful analyses.
- In February 2020, a slightly larger proportion of Year 7 students who were enrolled across the ACT's government and non-government high schools were male (51%) than female (49%)¹.
- The larger proportion of male students (54%) compared to female students (45%) in the Y7HC survey reflects the larger proportion of male to female students (69% versus 31%) in the survey who were from non-government schools compared to the proportion of male to female students who were from government schools (48% compared to 52%).
- Students who could participate in the Y7HC survey but chose not to numbered 678 and were similarly distributed across males and females compared to students who participated in the survey. Three per cent of participating students identified as Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander.

Results

Questions in the Y7HC survey about food and drinks were not limited to items from any one source such as the home or the school canteen, but applied to all food and drinks that were consumed regardless of where they were sourced.

Fruit and vegetable intake

The *Australian Dietary Guidelines* recommends that children eat 2 serves of fruit and 5 serves of vegetables daily². The survey found that for:



Fruit

84% of Year 7 students reported that they usually eat 2 or more serves of fruit each day.

- There was no real difference in the percentage of girls and boys who reported eating 2 or more serves of fruit each day.



Vegetables

27% of Year 7 students reported that they usually eat 5 or more serves of vegetables daily.

- There was no real difference in the percentage of girls and boys who reported eating 5 or more serves of vegetables each day.

59% of Year 7 students reported that they usually eat between 2 and 4 serves of vegetables each day.

- There was no real difference in the percentage of girls and boys who reported eating 2 to 4 serves of vegetables daily.



Discretionary food choices

The *Australian Dietary Guidelines* recommends that children limit their intake of discretionary foods as part of their daily diet as these foods are high in saturated fat, and/or sugar and/or salt and have limited nutritional value². Examples of discretionary food include biscuits, cakes, pastries, pies, processed meats, commercial burgers, pizza, fried foods, potato chips, crisps and other savoury snacks.

Fast food and snacks as a whole

93% of Year 7 students reported eating some fast food or snacks in the 7 days prior to the survey.

Fast food (includes commercial burgers, fried chicken or fish or chips, pizza and pies)



0-2

87% of Year 7 students ate fast food on two or fewer times in the week prior to the survey, with 31% of these students not eating any fast food during this time.

- There was no real difference in the percentage of girls and boys who had not eaten any fast food during the week before the survey.



7+

2% of Year 7 students reported eating fast food 7 or more times in the 7 days prior to the survey.

- There was no real difference in the percentage of girls and boys who had eaten fast food 7 or more times during the week before the survey.



Snacks (includes confectionery, cakes, biscuits, chips, crisps and ice cream)



0-2

44% of Year 7 students ate discretionary type snacks on two or fewer times in the week prior to the survey, with 6% of these students not eating any of these snacks during this time.

- There was no real difference in the percentage of girls and boys who had eaten discretionary-type snacks at least once during the week before the survey.



6% of Year 7 students reported that they had not eaten any discretionary-type snacks in the 7 days prior to the survey.

- There was no real difference in the percentage of girls and boys who had not eaten snacks during the week before the survey.



7+

13% of Year 7 students reported that they had eaten snacks 7 or more times in the week before the survey.

- There was no real difference in the percentage of girls and boys who had eaten snacks 7 or more times during the week before the survey.

Discretionary drink choices

The *Australian Dietary Guidelines* recommends water and milk as fluids of choice for children. Intake of discretionary drinks such as sugar-sweetened drinks including soft drinks, sports drinks, vitamin waters, cordials, fruit drinks and energy drinks should be limited².

85% of Year 7 students reported that they **had consumed discretionary drinks at least once** in the week before the survey (Figure 1).

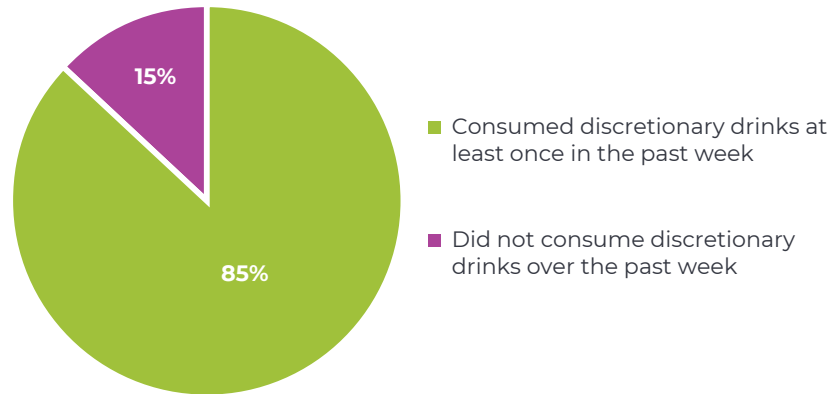


Figure 1: Proportion of ACT Year 7 students and consumption of discretionary fluids in the 7 days prior to the survey

Fruit juice and fruit juice drinks, soft drinks and cordials, and flavoured milk were the most frequently consumed discretionary drink choices of Year 7 students with 60%, 55% and 37% respectively of students consuming these fluids at least once in the week prior to the survey (see Figure 2).



32% of students **consumed fruit juice or fruit juice drinks** once or twice **and** **40%** of students **did not** consume them at all in this period.



36% of students **consumed sugar-sweetened soft drinks or cordials** once or twice during the week before the survey **and** **45%** of students **did not consume** these drinks at all during this period.



25% of students **consumed flavoured milk** once or twice during the week prior to the survey **and** **63%** of students did not consume flavoured milk at all during this time.

- There was no real difference in the percentage of girls and boys who had consumed some fruit juice or fruit juice drinks, or flavoured milk during the week before the survey. However, a significantly larger percentage of boys than girls consumed sugar-sweetened soft drinks and cordials at least once during the week before the survey (61% of boys compared to 47% of girls).

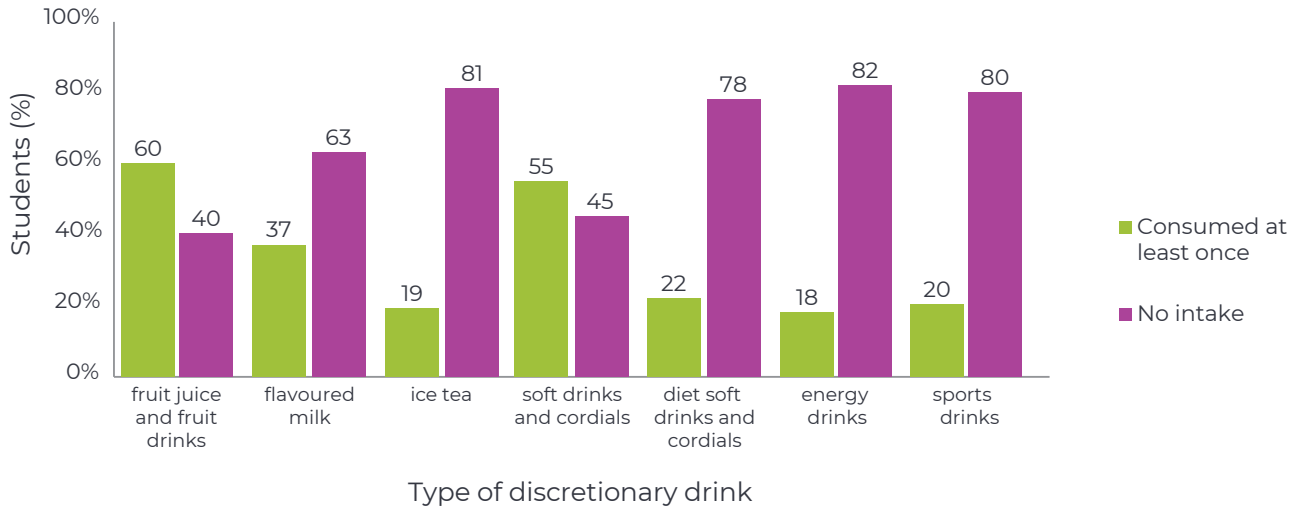


Figure 2: Proportion of ACT Year 7 students and consumption of discretionary fluids one or more times or not at all in the 7 days prior to the survey



Sports drinks, iced tea and energy drinks were the least consumed discretionary drink choices of Year 7 students with 80%, 81% and 82% of students respectively reporting that they had not had any of these fluids in the week prior to the survey (see Figure 2).

Of the students who had consumed some of these drinks:

- There was no real difference in the percentage of girls and boys who had consumed any iced tea or energy drinks during the week before the survey.
- A significantly larger percentage of boys compared to girls had consumed sports drinks at least once during the week before the survey (26% of boys compared to 13% of girls).



Meal-related behaviour

There are many influences on food choices that can challenge how successful young people are at meeting the dietary recommendations in the *Australian Dietary Guidelines*. Meal patterns have been shown to be important; those established in adolescence can predict diet quality and meal patterns in young adulthood. Skipping breakfast is a meal pattern which has been linked to a less nutritious diet, and to a higher risk of being overweight during adolescence³.

Breakfast

61% of Year 7 students reported that they **usually eat breakfast** while

12% of students reported that they **rarely or never eat breakfast.**

- Significantly fewer girls than boys usually eat breakfast everyday (50% of girls and 69% of boys).
- There was no real difference in the percentage of girls and boys who never or rarely eat breakfast.



Meal related activities

Year 7 students were asked about their dinner helping activities, whether they ate at the table with family and if they ate dinner while watching television or while using an electronic device (see Figure 3).



88% of Year 7 students **helped prepare dinner, or set or clear the dinner table** at least once or twice a week; and similarly



90% of students reported **eating dinner at the table with most of the family** at least once or twice a week.



64% of Year 7 students reported that they **usually helped with dinner preparation or clearing up** at least 3 to 4 times a week with



31% of students **helping everyday while 12%** said **that they rarely or never did so.**

- There was no real difference seen between the percentage of girls compared to boys who rarely or never helped with dinner preparation or clearing up afterwards.

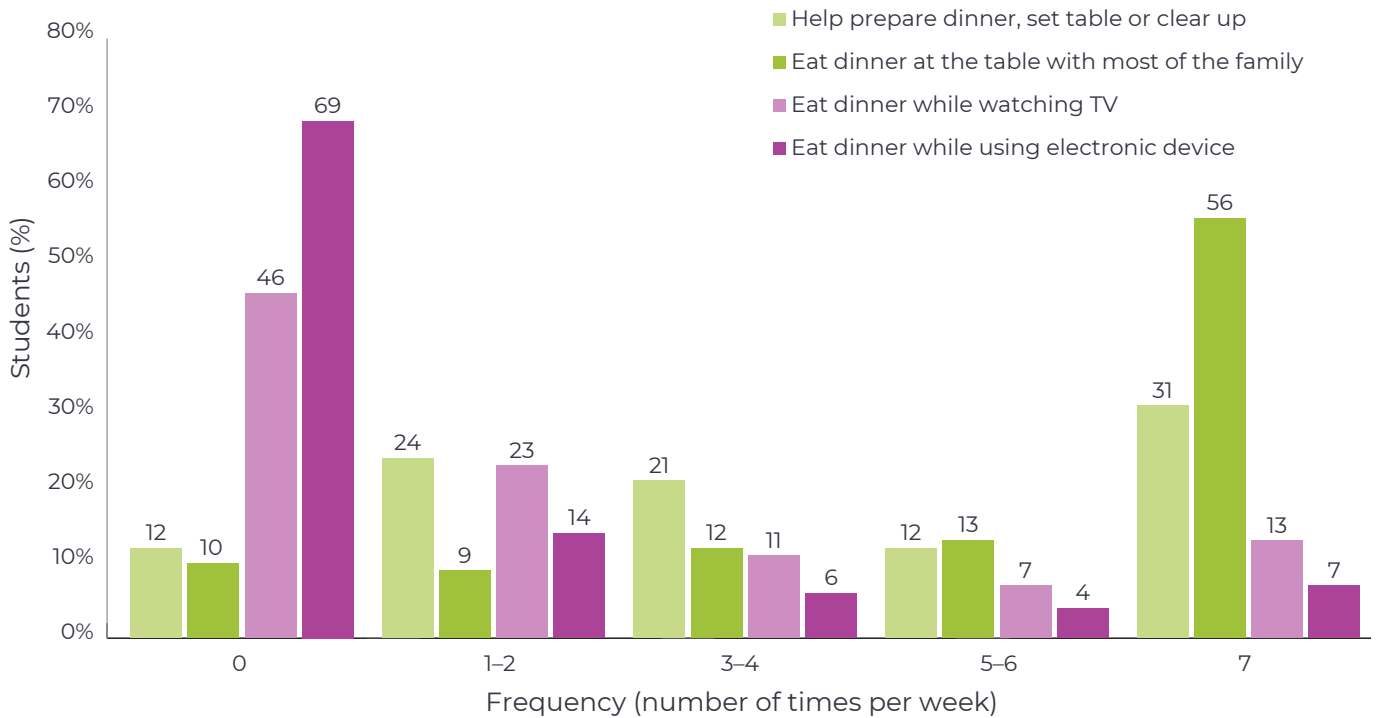


Figure 3: Usual dinner-related activities of Year 7 students in the ACT



More than half

of Year 7 students (56%) reported that they usually eat dinner at the table with most of the family every day.

- There was no real difference between girls and boys and how often they usually eat dinner at the table with most of the family.



54% of students reported eating dinner while watching television

at least once or twice a week; however



69% never or rarely ate dinner while using an electronic device.

- There was no real difference between the percentage of girls compared to boys and the number of times they would usually eat dinner while using an electronic device.

Physical activity

For good health, development and wellbeing, the *Australian 24 hour movement guidelines for children and young people (5 to 17 years)* recommends that young people achieve a balance of high physical activity level, low levels of sedentary behaviour and sufficient sleep each day⁴. High physical activity levels can be achieved by accumulating 60 minutes or more per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity.



29% of Year 7 students reported that they **did at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily** in the 7 days prior to the survey.

- Significantly fewer girls than boys accumulated a minimum 60 minutes of physical activity daily during the week before the survey (23% of girls compared to 34% of boys).



78% of Year 7 students reported **doing at least 60 minutes of physical activity on 3 or more days in the week** prior to the survey.

- There was no real difference between the percentage of girls compared to boys who were physically active for at least 60 minutes on each of 3 or more days during the week before the survey.



6% of students reported that they **did not accumulate** a minimum 60 minutes of physical activity on any day during the week prior to the survey.

- There was no real difference between the percentage of girls compared to boys who did not accumulate at least 60 minutes of physical activity on any day of the week before the survey.

Sedentary behaviour

Sedentary behaviour is sitting or lying down and not being physically active. The *Australian 24 hour movement guidelines for children and young people (5 to 17 years)* recommends that children and young people have low levels of sedentary behaviour including limiting the time spent sitting and that no more than 2 hours per day is used for sedentary recreational screen-based activities on any day of the week⁴.

Year 7 students were asked about the time they spent sitting or lying down to participate in sedentary activities such as vehicle travel, reading and writing during their free time (outside of school-related time), and screen-based activities using devices or the internet including watching videos, playing games and social networking during a typical weekday (Monday to Friday) and weekend (Saturday and Sunday) (see Figure 4).



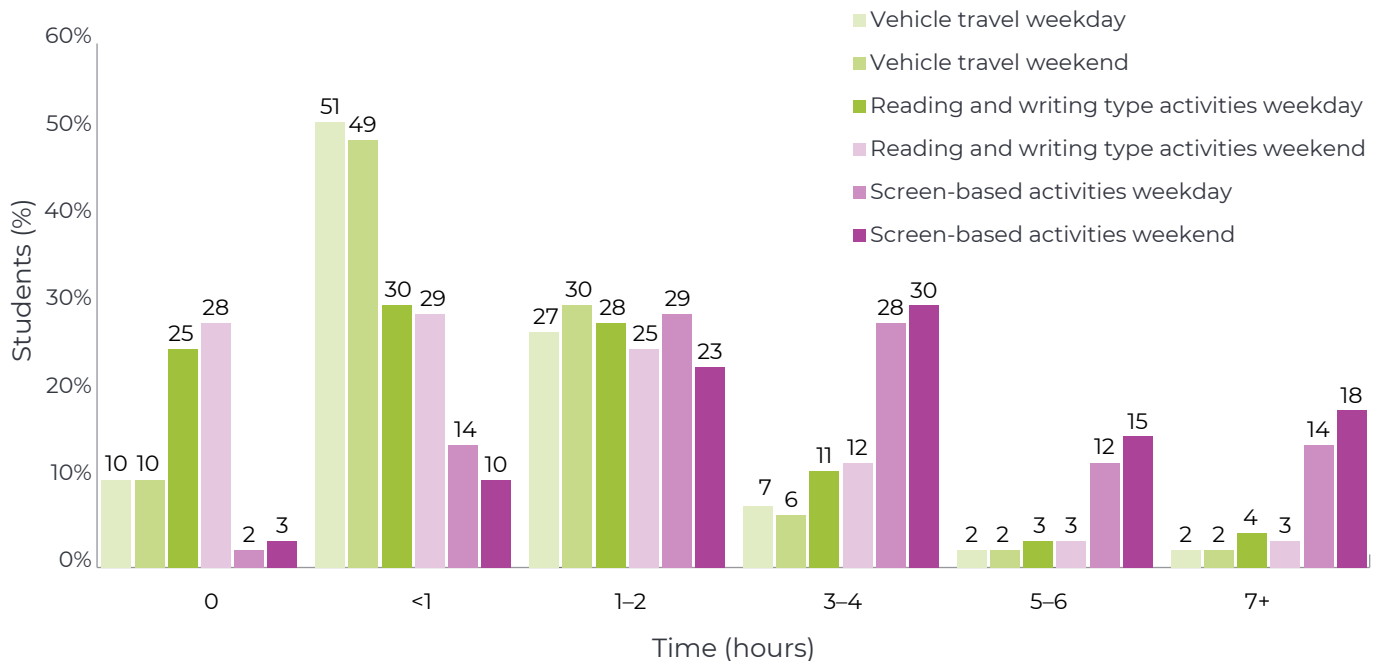


Figure 4: Time spent by Year 7 students in sedentary activities on weekdays and weekend days (Note that percentages within categories may not add to 100 due to the effect of rounding)

During weekdays and weekend days, more than half of Year 7 students spent more than 6 hours each day on a combination of sedentary activities.

- On weekdays, 61% of students spent at least 6 hours a day on a combination of sedentary behaviours. During weekends, this increased to 68% of students.
- There was no real difference in the percentage of girls compared to boys who spent at least 6 hours on sedentary behaviours a day on both weekdays and weekends.

Screen-based activities were the most common form of sedentary activity of Year 7 students with 98% and 97% of students spending some time each day during a typical weekday and weekend day respectively on screen-based activities. Screen time did not exclude time spent on devices for school educational purposes and should be interpreted with care.

- During a typical weekday 54% of students spent more than two hours on screen-based activities each day and during a typical weekend day this increased to 64% of students each day.
- Some students during a typical weekday (14%) and typical weekend day (18%) reported spending 7 or more hours on screen-based activities each day.

Travel by vehicle was the second most common form of sedentary activity reported by Year 7 students with 90% of students spending some time each day during both a typical weekday and weekend day travelling in a vehicle.

- Around half of Year 7 students spent less than an hour each day travelling in a vehicle on a typical weekday (51%) and weekend day (49%).

Time spent on activities such as reading and writing during students' free time was reported by 75% of Year 7 students during a typical weekday and by 72% of students for a typical weekend day.

- Over half the students (58% of students on each typical weekday and 55% on each typical weekend day) spent up to 2 hours reading and writing.

Sleep

The *Australian 24 hour movement guidelines for children and young people (5 to 17 years)* recommends young people aged 5–13 years should have 9 to 11 hours of uninterrupted sleep each night. This reduces to 8 to 10 hours per night for those aged 14–17 years⁴.



Hours of sleep

More than half

of Year 7 students (58%) reported that they **had less than the recommended hours of sleep** per night on a typical night.

One third (33%)

of Year 7 students reported that they **slept 7 hours or less** on a typical night.

Significantly fewer girls compared to boys

(36% and 47% respectively)

slept for the recommended number of hours on a typical night.



Quality of sleep

28% of Year 7 students **went to sleep at the same time** each night on 6 to 7 nights of the week before the survey while 39% of Year 7 students did so on 3 to 5 nights of the week before the survey.

- Significantly more girls than boys (38% of girls compared to 28% of boys) went to sleep at the same time each night on 2 or fewer nights of the week before the survey.
- Most students (75%) did not fall asleep while watching TV or using an electronic device during the week before the survey.

45% of Year 7 students **woke up at the same time each morning** on 6 to 7 days of the week before the survey while

34% of Year 7 students **did so on 3 to 5 days** of the week before the survey.

- There was no real difference in the percentage of girls compared to boys in the number of days they awoke at the same time during the week before the survey.

The majority of Year 7 students, **83%**, said that they **never awoke from sleep to watch TV or use an electronic device** such as a mobile phone or computer during the week before the survey, while 17% had experienced interrupted sleep through these means.

- There was no real difference in the percentage of girls compared to boys in the number of nights that their sleep was interrupted by watching TV or using an electronic device such as a mobile phone or computer.

Self-rated Health

Self-assessed health reflects the perception of health at a given point in time and captures an overall conception of health. Self-appraisal of health is affected by a range of health dimensions including physical and psychological dimensions, as well as non-health aspects such as age and gender. For adolescents, younger females tend to report poorer self-assessed health compared to males⁵.

50% of Year 7 students rated their health as being very good or excellent over the month prior to the survey, with 20% of students rating their health as excellent. A similar percentage of students, 19%, considered their health to be less than good over this same time period with 15% rating it as fair and 4% rating it as poor.

- There was no real difference in the percentage of girls compared to boys who rated themselves as being in very good or excellent health.
- Significantly fewer girls rated themselves as being in good, very good or excellent health compared to boys (78% of girls compared to 84% of boys).⁷



Summary of findings

Healthy eating, regular physical activity and good sleep habits are important for a healthy body and mind. At a population level, Year 7 students in the ACT did well in meeting the recommended daily guidelines for fruit intake, and largely kept their intake of discretionary fast food, snacks and drinks down to not more than two occasions in a week. Half of the Year 7 students also rated their health as very good or excellent.

However, more than half of the Year 7 students did not meet the recommendations for vegetable intake, physical activity, and sleep and some discretionary drinks were consumed by over a quarter of students several times a week. Further, around one fifth of students rated their health as either fair or poor.

While there were some differences noted between the behaviours of boys and girls, for the most part the survey findings applied equally to girls and boys.

Services and resources to help students work to improve their physical and emotional health and wellbeing are available from ACT Health's [School Health services | Health \(act.gov.au\)](https://act.gov.au/school-health-services)

It should be noted that the findings of the Y7HC survey are not directly comparable to the findings of other ACT Health survey data, such as the ACT Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey. This is due to differences in the population being sampled and differences in the questions asked.

References

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- 5 Cavallo F, Dalmaso P, Ottova-Jordan V, Brooks F, Mazur J, Valimaa R, et al. Trends in self-rated health in European and North-American adolescents from 2002 to 2010 in 32 countries. *Eur J Public Health*. 2015;25 Suppl 2:13-5.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

ACT Health acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, the Ngunnawal people. ACT Health respects their continuing culture and connections to the land and the unique contributions they make to the life of this area. ACT Health also acknowledges and welcomes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are part of the community we serve.

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