

Year 7 Health Survey 2021 report



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Year 7 health survey

The Year 7 Health Survey (Y7HS) formerly known as the Year 7 Health Check Survey, is an annual health and wellbeing survey of Year 7 students in the ACT. It is available to all Year 7 students in public, Catholic and independent schools. The survey is managed by the ACT Health Directorate and delivered with the support of the ACT Education Directorate. Findings from the Y7HS will be used to inform, develop, and expand population health and wellbeing initiatives to improve the health and wellbeing of young people in the ACT.

The Y7HS has been approved by the ACT Health Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), the ACT Government Education Directorate and Catholic Education, Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn. The ACT Association of Independent Schools has also given in-principle support for the Y7HS.

Implementation of the survey

All English-literate Year 7 students attending ACT high schools were eligible to participate in the 2021 Y7HS. Students who did not wish to participate were able to opt-out from the survey. For students in ACT public schools, the survey is implemented in class as part of the ACT Education Directorate's annual School Satisfaction and Climate Survey process, while students in non-government schools were provided a weblink to complete the online survey either within or outside the classroom setting with the consent of their parents.

Data collection for the 2021 Y7HS commenced as planned on 13 August 2021 but was put on hold due to the COVID-19 lockdowns in the ACT. Data collection resumed on 18 October 2021 and continued for 4 weeks till 12 November 2021. During the data collection period, students were undertaking a mixed mode of learning where some were home schooling while others were transitioning to face-to-face learning at school.

Questions in the Y7HS covered topics such as: 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 levels of physical activity, sedentary behaviour, active travel to and from school, sleep and general wellbeing.

In February 2021, 5,902 Year 7 students were enrolled across all high schools in the ACT¹. There were slightly more males (3,043) than females (2,856) in the Year 7 cohort¹.

Survey participants

At the close of the survey period, 1,640 Year 7 students from 29 public and non-government high schools in the ACT had participated in the Y7HS, resulting in a survey response rate of 32% of students whose schools made the survey available to them.

The response rate may have been affected by COVID-19 related disruptions in data collection, e.g., loss of dedicated class time to complete the survey and students being engaged in mixed modes of learning while transitioning back to face-to-face schooling post lockdowns in the ACT.

Of the participating students, 49% were female, 43% male, and the remaining 3% identified as being of 'Other' gender while 5% did not respond to the 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.

Two percent of the students who took part in the 2021 Y7HS identified themselves as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin.

Results


Fruit and vegetable intake

The [Australian Dietary Guidelines](#) recommend that children eat 2 serves of fruit and 5 serves of vegetables daily². Eating enough fruit and vegetables everyday can help protect children against chronic diseases including heart disease, stroke and some types of cancer².

The survey found that:





Fruit consumption

 **82%** of Year 7 students who took part in the survey reported that they ate 2 or more serves of fruit each day.

- Females (85%) were significantly more likely to meet the recommended fruit intake guidelines than males (81%) in this Year 7 cohort.

Vegetable consumption

 **20%** of students reported that they ate 5 or more serves of vegetables each day.

 **64%** (more than half) of the students reported that they ate 3 or more serves of vegetables each day.

- There was no significant difference between the proportions of males and females who met the recommended daily vegetable intake.

Discretionary food intake

Discretionary foods are high in saturated fat, and/or sugar and/or salt and have limited nutritional value². Examples of discretionary food include biscuits, cakes, confectionary, pastries, pies, processed meats, commercial burgers, pizza, fried foods, potato chips, crisps and other savoury snacks.

The [Australian Dietary Guidelines](#) recommend that children limit their intake of discretionary foods in their daily diet as they are associated with increased risk of obesity and chronic diseases including heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and some cancers².

The survey found that 97% of Year 7 students ate discretionary food/s (fast food and snacks) in the 7 days prior to the survey.



Fast food:



67% of students reported that they **ate some fast food** in the 7 days prior to the survey, while **33%** reported not eating any fast food.



1-2

57% (over half) of the students reported that they **ate fast food 1-2 times** during the week before the survey.



7+

1% of students reported **eating fast food 7 or more times** in the week prior to the survey

- There was no significant difference in the percentage of girls and boys who had eaten any fast food during the week before the survey.

Discretionary snacks:



95% (the majority) of Year 7 students reported that they **ate snacks** in the 7 days prior to the survey.



1-2

31% of students reported that they **ate snacks 1-2 times** per week.

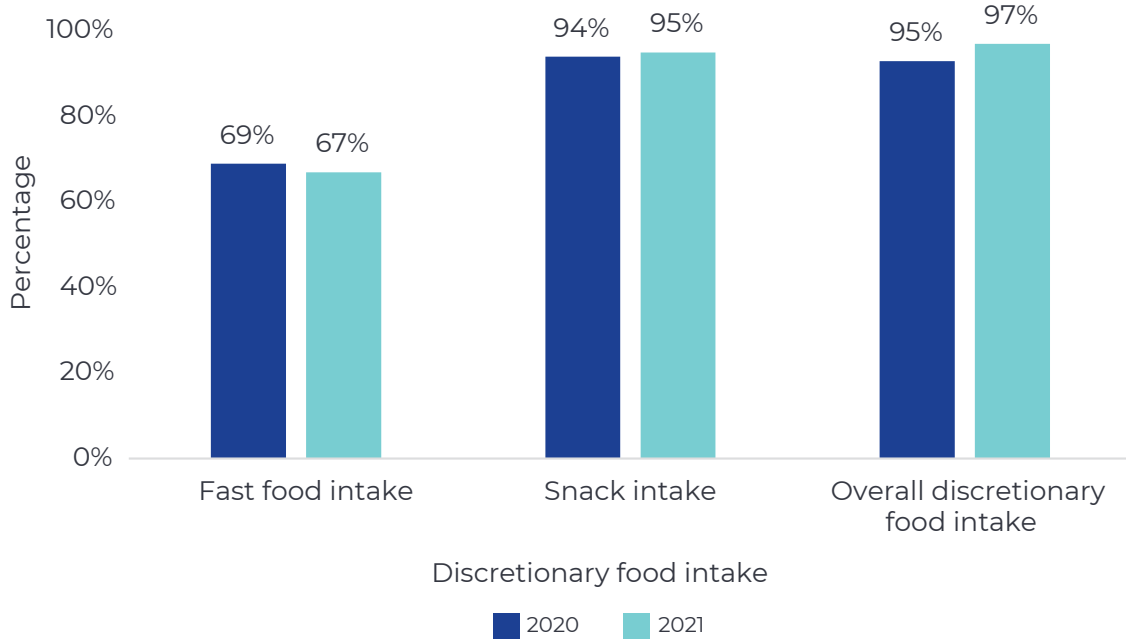


7+

18% of students reported that they **ate snacks 7 or more times** during the week before the survey.

- Females (97%) were significantly more likely to eat snacks in the 7 days prior to the survey than males (94%).

Figure 1: Comparison of discretionary food intake 7 days prior to the survey, ACT Year 7 students, 2020 and 2021



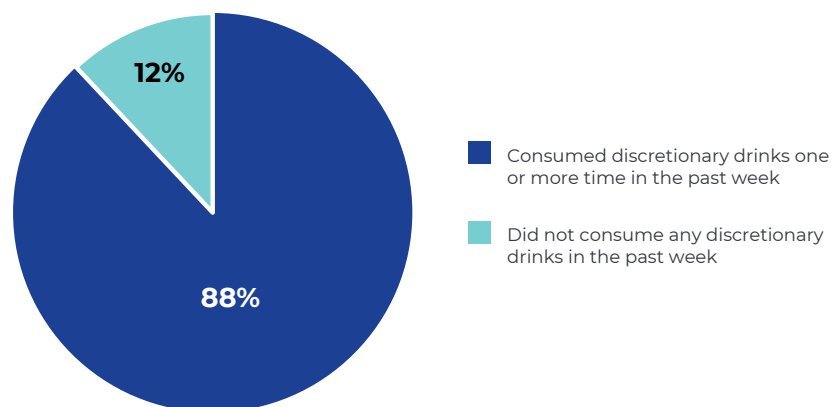
Source: Year 7 Health Survey 2020, 2021

There were no significant differences between years in the consumption of fast food or snacks one or more times in the week leading up to the survey (Figure 1). Similarly, no significant differences were detected between 2020 and 2021 for the overall discretionary food intake in this cohort.

Discretionary drinks

The [Australian Dietary Guidelines](#) recommend 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.

Figure 2: Consumption of discretionary drinks in the 7 days prior to the survey, ACT Year 7 students, 2021



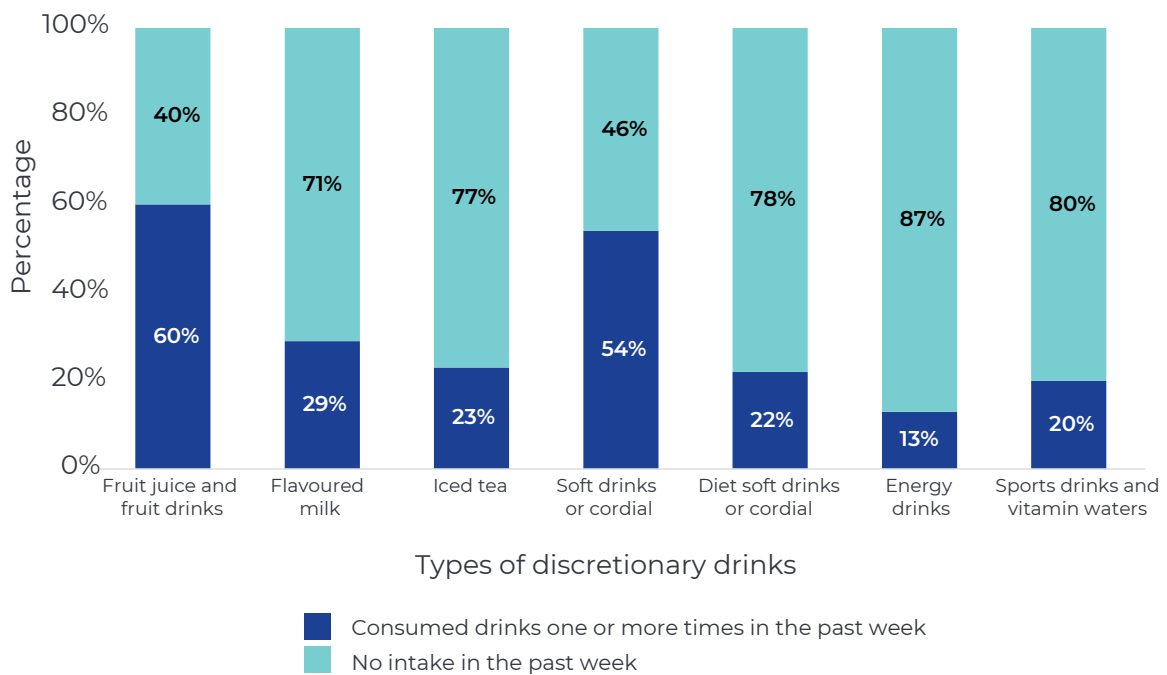
The majority of the Year 7 population who took part in the survey reported that they had consumed discretionary drinks one or more times in the week prior to the survey (Figure 2).

Source: Year 7 Health Survey 2021

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%, 54% and 29% respectively of students consuming these drinks at least once in the week prior to the survey. Energy drinks, sports drinks and vitamin waters were the least consumed discretionary drinks by this Year 7 cohort (Figure 3).

The discretionary drink preferences of Year 7 students, both most consumed and least consumed remained unchanged between 2020 and 2021³.

Figure 3: Consumption of discretionary drinks in the week prior to the survey, ACT Year 7 Students, 2021



Source: Year 7 Health Survey 2021

In the week prior to the survey,

Fruit juice:



40% of students reported that they **did not drink any fruit juice or fruit drinks.**



6% of students reported that they **drank fruit juice 7 or more times.**

- There was no significant difference in the consumption of fruit juice or fruit drink between males and females.

Flavoured milk:



71% of students reported that they **did not drink flavoured milk** while **29%** reported **drinking flavoured milk one or more times.**



2% of students reported that they **drank flavoured milk 7 or more times.**

- There was no significant difference in flavoured milk consumption between males and females.

Iced tea:



77% of students reported that they **did not drink iced tea** while **23%** reported that they **had consumed iced tea one or more times.**

- There was no significant difference in iced tea consumption between males and females.

Soft drinks or cordial:



46% of students reported that they **did not drink any soft drinks or cordial** while **54%** reported they **drank soft drinks or cordial.**

- Males (58%) were significantly more likely to drink soft drinks or cordial than females (49%) in this Year 7 cohort.

Diet soft drinks or cordial:



78% of students reported that they **did not drink any diet soft drinks or cordial** while **22%** reported that they **drank diet soft drinks or cordials.**

- There was no significant difference in consumption of diet soft drinks or cordial between males and females.

Energy drinks:



87% of students reported that they **did not drink any energy drinks** while **13%** reported that they **drank energy drinks.**

- There was no significant difference in energy drink consumption between males and females.

Sports drinks and vitamin waters:



80% of students reported that they **did not consume any sports drinks and vitamin waters** while **20%** reported that they **consumed these drinks.**

- Males (24%) were significantly more likely to drink sports drinks and vitamin waters than females (17%) in this cohort.

Breakfast intake

There are a number of health benefits from eating breakfast. It improves energy levels, memory, and ability to concentrate in the short term, and can help with better weight management, reduced risk of type 2 diabetes and heart disease in the long term⁴.

The majority of students who took part in the survey (87%) reported that they ate breakfast one or more times in the week prior to the survey while 13% reported that they did not eat breakfast or rarely ate breakfast in the same week. Over half of the participants (55%) reported that they ate breakfast every day in the week before the survey. Males (64%) were significantly more likely to eat breakfast than females (51%) in this cohort.

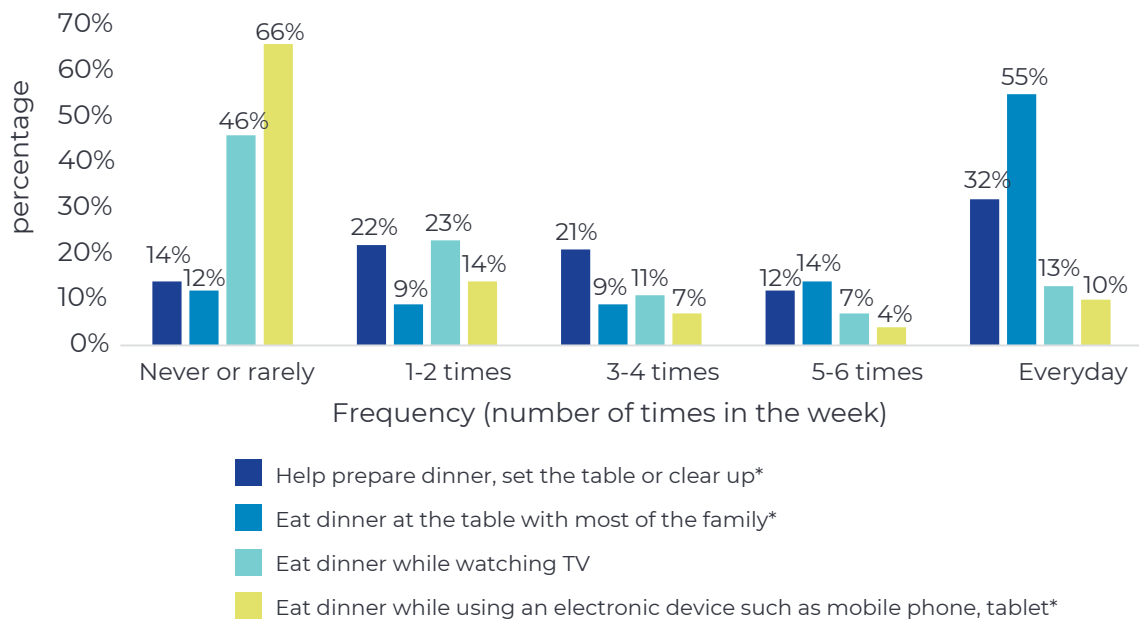


Interestingly, students who ate breakfast (50%) were significantly more likely to report very good or excellent self-rated health in the month before the survey compared to those who did not eat breakfast (30%).

Mealtime behaviours

Year 7 students were asked about their dinner activities including whether they assisted in preparing dinner, ate at the table with family or if they ate dinner while watching television or while using an electronic device (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Mealtime activities, ACT Year 7 students, 2021



*Note that percentages within categories may not add to 100 due to the effect of rounding
 Source: Year 7 Health Survey 2021

Help prepare dinner, set the table or clear up during mealtimes:



32% of participants reported that they **help prepare dinner, set the table or clear up during mealtimes** each night while **14%** reported that they **never or rarely help prepare dinner, set the table or clear up.**



3+

65% (over half) of the participants reported that they **help during mealtimes 3 or more times per week.**

- Females (89%) were significantly more likely to help during mealtimes compared to males (83%).

Eat dinner at the table with most of the family:



55% of participants reported that they **ate dinner at the table with most of the family every day** while **12%** reported that they **never or rarely ate dinner at the table with most of the family.**



3+

78% of participants reported that they **ate dinner at the table with family 3 or more times a week.**

- There was no significant difference between the percentages of males and females eating dinner at the table with most of the family.

Eating dinner while watching TV:



46% of respondents reported that they **never or rarely ate dinner while watching TV** while **13%** reported that they **ate dinner while watching TV every day.**

- There was no significant difference between the percentages of males and females and the number of times they would usually eat dinner while watching TV.

Eating dinner while using an electronic device such as a mobile phone or tablet:



66% of students reported that they **never or rarely ate dinner while using an electronic device.**



10% of students reported that they **used an electronic device every day while eating dinner.**


- There was no significant difference between the percentages of males and females who used an electronic device while eating dinner.


Physical activity

The [Australian 24-hour movement guidelines for children and young people \(5 to 17 years\)](#) recommend that young people should do 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity (movements that makes the heartbeat faster) each day. The Y7HS collected information on daily physical activity including the time students spent on active video games.

The survey found that,

 **30%** of the participants reported that they **did the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity every day** in the week prior to the survey.

 **82%** (the majority) reported that they **did the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity 3 or more days** in the week before the survey.

 **5%** reported that they **did not meet the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity** on any of the days in the week prior to the survey.

- Males (35%) were significantly more likely to meet the physical activity guidelines compared to females (29%) in this cohort.

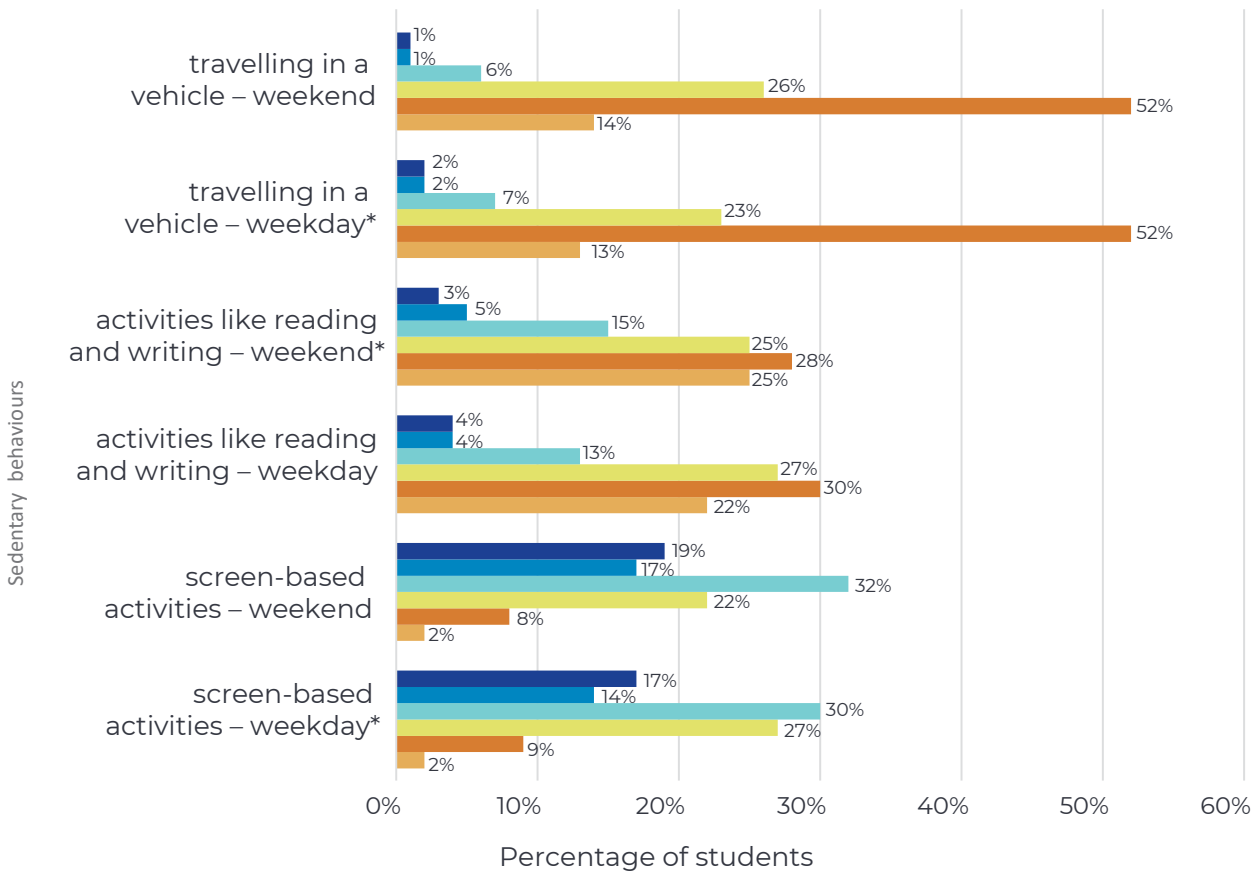


Sedentary behaviour

Sedentary behaviour is sitting or lying down and not being physically active. The [Australian 24 hour movement guidelines for children and young people \(5 to 17 years\)](#) recommend that children and young people should limit their sedentary behaviour, including time spent sitting, and that no more than 2 hours per day is spent on sedentary recreational screen-based activities on any day of the week⁵.

The Y7HS asked Year 7 students about the time they spent sitting or lying down to participate in sedentary activities such as vehicle travel, reading and writing, 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 5).

Figure 5: Sedentary behaviours of Year 7 students during free time in the ACT, 2021



Sedentary behaviours of Year 7 students during free time in the ACT

- About 7 or more hrs
- About 5-6hrs
- About 3-5hrs
- About 1-2hrs
- Less than 1hr
- None

*Note that percentages within categories may not add to 100 due to the effect of rounding

Source: Year 7 Health Survey 2021

Screen-based activities were the most common sedentary behaviour engaged in by this student population.



61% reported spending **3 hours or more** on a screen on **weekdays** and **68%** on the **weekend**.

Travelling in a vehicle:



88% and 92% (the majority of the participants) reported that they **travelled in a vehicle 2 hours or less** each day on weekdays and on the weekend.

Screen-based activities like watching videos, playing games or on the internet or on social media during free time:



During a typical weekday, **39%** of students reported engaging in screen-based activities (outside of school-related time) for less than 2 hours per day while **61%** reported **exceeding 2 hours** in the week prior to the survey.



During a typical weekend day, **32%** of students reported that they **engaged in screen-based activities up to 2 hours per day** while **68%** reported **spending more than 2 hours** engaged in screen-based activities.



17% reported that they spent **7 or more hours** using screen-based activities during a **typical weekday** compared to **19%** on the weekend.



Sleep

The [Australian 24 hour movement guidelines for children and young people \(5 to 17 years\)](#) recommend young people aged 5 to 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 to 17 years. Furthermore, to establish and maintain healthy sleep patterns, children and young people should have a consistent bedtime routine, avoid screen time before sleep, and keep screens out of the bedroom⁵.



Of the students who took part in the survey, 35% reported that they met the daily sleep guidelines while 65% reported not getting adequate sleep for their age. The majority of the participants (82%) reported that they slept 7 hours or more on a typical night. There was no significant difference between the proportions of males and females who met the daily sleep guidelines.

Furthermore, students who met the daily sleep guidelines were significantly more likely to rate their self-rated health in the last month before the survey as very good or excellent in comparison to those who didn't get enough sleep each day.

In terms of sleep behaviours:



17% of Year 7 students reported that they **went to sleep at the same time each day** while **48%** of students reported that they **went to sleep at the same time for 5 or more days** in the past week.



28% of the students who took part in the Y7HS reported that they **woke up at the same time each day**.



65% (over half of the students) reported that they **woke up at the same time for 5 or more days** in the past week.



76% (the majority) of the participants reported that they **did not fall asleep while using electronic devices** in the past week.



6% of the students reported that they **fell asleep daily while using electronic devices** in the week before the survey.



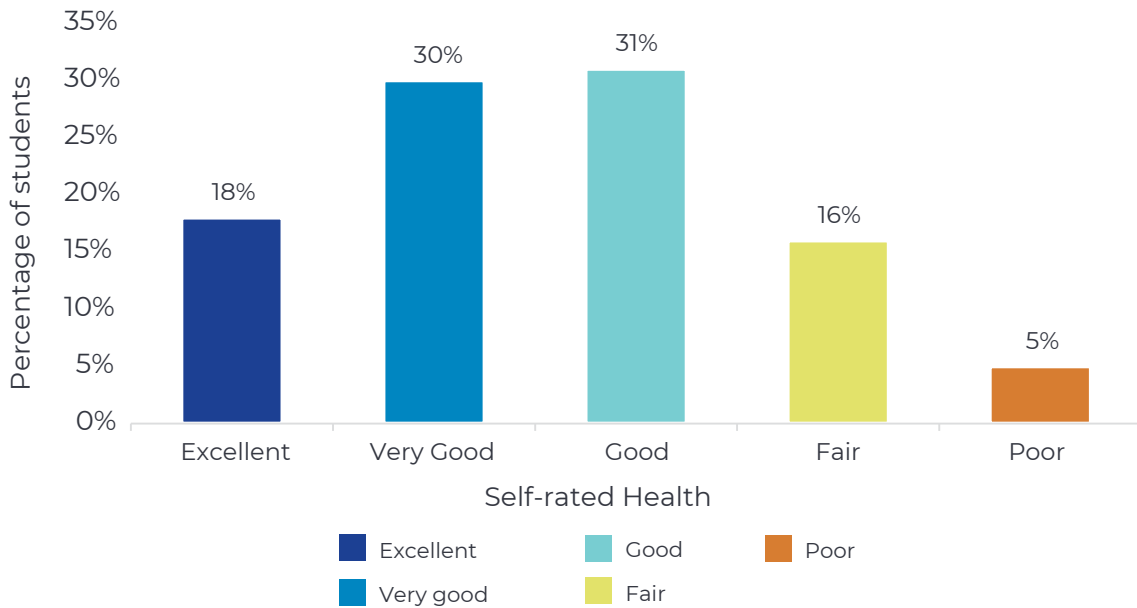
83% (the majority) of students who took part in the Y7HS reported that they **did not wake up during the night to use electronic devices** while **17%** reported that they **woke up during the night to use an electronic device one or more days** in the past week.

- There were no significant differences between males and females and their sleep behaviours in this cohort of Year 7 students.


Self-rated health


Self-rated health captures an individual's view on their own health and wellbeing and provides a general overview of both physical and mental health at a point in time. The students who took part in the Y7HS were asked to rate their health as poor, fair, good, very good, or excellent in the month leading up to the survey (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Self-rated health of Year 7 students in the ACT, 2021



Source: Year 7 Health Survey 2021

 **48%** of the students who took part in the Y7HS **rated their health as excellent or very good** in the month before the survey. Only **5%** of the students **rated their health as poor** in the month leading up to the survey and **16%** rated their health as fair.

 In 2020, **50%** of Year 7 students **rated their health as being very good or excellent** over the month prior to the survey compared with **48%** in 2021.

- Males (52%) were significantly more likely to self-rate their health as excellent or very good in comparison to females (45%) in this Year 7 cohort.

Summary of 2021 Y7HS findings

Healthy eating, regular physical activity and good quality sleep are important factors for good physical and mental health and wellbeing at any age.

Overall, the Year 7 student population did well in achieving recommendations for fruit intake. Almost half (48%) rated their health as very good or excellent in the week prior to the survey while 21% rated their health as fair or poor. Over half the participants ate breakfast every day (55%), ate dinner at the table with most of the family (55%) and did not use electronic devices during mealtimes (66%).

However, only a small proportion of students met the recommended vegetable intake (20%), physical activity (30%), and sleep guidelines (35%) every day. Almost all Year 7 students ate discretionary food, such as fast food and snacks, and drank discretionary drinks one or more times in the week prior to the survey.

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

ACT Health's [School Health services | Health \(act.gov.au\)](https://www.health.act.gov.au/school-health-services), [Health and Wellbeing Services for Adolescents](https://www.health.act.gov.au/adolescent-health), [Resources for Adolescent Health and Wellbeing](https://www.health.act.gov.au/resources-for-adolescent-health) and [Year 7 Health Spotlight](https://www.health.act.gov.au/year-7-health-spotlight) factsheets provide a list of services and resources to help students work towards improving their physical and emotional health and wellbeing.

It should be noted that the findings of the Y7HS 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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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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