



Mott Poll Report

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Healthy Eating and Use of Dietary Supplements in Children

Dietary supplements are used to increase the intake of certain vitamins, minerals, enzymes, or other ingredients beyond what a person consumes in their regular diet. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children 1-10 years about their views on their child's diet and use of supplements.

Nearly half of parents report a problem with their child's diet, such as the child being a picky eater (35%), not eating enough fruits and vegetables (31%), not getting enough of certain vitamins and minerals (13%), and not getting enough fiber (9%). Only 52% of parents say their child eats a well-balanced diet overall. Over half of parents (58%) agree that it is hard to get their child to eat a balanced diet, while 47% agree that it is expensive to feed their child a healthy diet.

Most parents have given their child dietary supplements, including multivitamins (78%), probiotics (45%), Omega 3 (22%) or specific vitamins (44%) or minerals (25%). Half of parents (52%) say their child regularly takes a supplement and 33% say their child has tried but does not take them regularly. Among parents who have given their child supplements, 80% say they chose products made specifically for children, and 43% say they discussed supplement use with their child's health care provider.

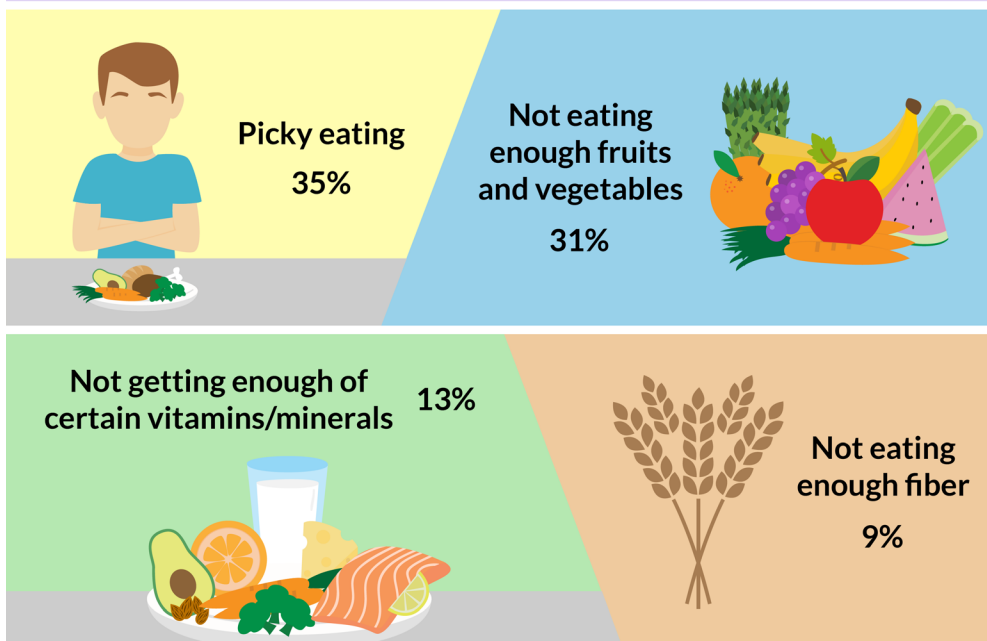
Among parents who feel their child does not eat a well-balanced diet, 51% have their child regularly take a dietary supplement; while among parents who feel their child eats a well-balanced diet, 53% have them regularly take a supplement.

Parents in higher-income (>\$100,000) households are more likely than parents in lower-income (<\$50,000) households to say their child regularly takes a dietary supplement (57% vs 44%), that they use a supplement made specifically for children (73% vs 63%) and that they have talked with their child's doctor about supplement use (47% vs 39%).

Factors very important to parent decisions about supplements include side effects (87%), testing for safety in children (85%), how well it works in children (82%), and recommendation of their child's doctor (65%). While 79% of parents say supplements should be regulated by the US Food and Drug Administration, only 59% cite FDA approval as very important to their decision.

Struggling to achieve a balanced diet

Percent of parents reporting a problem with their child's diet



Report Highlights

3 in 5 parents say it's hard to get their child to eat a well-balanced diet.

Half of parents report their child regularly takes a dietary supplement.

Parents from lower-income households are less likely to give their child a dietary supplement or discuss supplement use with their child's doctor.

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in October 2021 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 1-18 years living in their household (n=2,020). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 61% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 1,251 parents with at least one child age 1-10. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±2 to 7 percentage points.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the University of Michigan Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

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C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

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Implications

The best way for children to obtain the nutrients they need to be healthy is by eating a balanced diet that features a “rainbow” of fruits and vegetables, an appropriate amount of proteins, fiber and carbohydrates, and a limited amount of processed sugar. A balanced diet optimizes a child's growth and development, while an unhealthy diet can negatively affect short and long-term health outcomes as well as school performance.

The reality for many parents is that it is often difficult to get children to eat a healthy diet. Half of the parents in this Mott Poll reported at least one problem with their child's diet, from picky eating to not getting enough fruits and vegetables. Almost half of parents indicated that it is expensive to provide their child with a healthy diet, which can lead to frustration when children waste or refuse to eat healthy foods.

Dietary supplements are products intended to enhance the quantity of vitamins and minerals consumed through regular diet. Some supplements contain a single vitamin or mineral, while others are multivitamins. Other popular supplements include probiotics which are live bacteria and yeast taken to help digestion by enhancing the quantity of good microbes in the gut, and Omega 3 supplements which are fatty acids that support cell growth and brain development.

A particular challenge for parents is estimating whether their child is getting the recommended amounts of vitamins and minerals through regular diet, or whether their child would benefit from taking a dietary supplement.

In this Mott Poll, roughly half of parents reported their child regularly takes a dietary supplement, and another third have tried giving their child a supplement. However, less than half of parents recalled discussing this important health decision with their child's health care provider. It is unclear if this lack of consultation is the result of providers not asking about the child's nutrition, parents viewing supplement use as not warranting guidance from providers, or some other reason.

Parents considering a dietary supplement for their child are faced with a wide array of products and formulations, many claiming specific health benefits. Parents in this Mott Poll indicated that factors important to their decision were whether the supplements worked well, caused few side effects, and were made for children. Since supplements are classified by the FDA as food, they do not receive the same premarketing evaluation and review as medications; thus there is limited information to assess the safety and efficacy of supplements, or to know the side effects they may cause. It is unclear if parents recognize that supplements do not undergo rigorous FDA testing and approval.

This lack of information makes consultation with a pediatrician or other health care provider particularly important. To minimize the risks of supplement use, parents should share with the provider the concerns that are prompting them to consider giving their child a dietary supplement. Providers can help parents choose appropriate products and ensure accurate dosing of dietary supplements. In addition, providers can work with families to identify other strategies to improve the nutritional quality of their child's diet.

A concerning trend in this Mott Poll is that parents in lower-income households were less likely to talk about supplement use with their child's health care provider, compared to higher-income parents. Providers should be diligent about discussing nutrition with all parents, to ensure parents have adequate knowledge about what a healthy diet should include and are using supplements appropriately. In situations where families cannot afford to provide a healthy diet, providers may direct parents to social service programs that assist in this area.