

Diet and physical activity

Regular consumption of fruit and vegetables is associated with improved health outcomes – particularly in lowering the risk of cardiovascular diseases and certain types of cancer. WHO recommends eating at least 400 g, or five or more portions, of fruit and vegetables per day. A healthy diet may also reduce the likelihood of being overweight or obese. In 2019, diets low in fruit, vegetables and legumes were responsible for an estimated total of 2.7 million deaths worldwide (IHME, 2020^[1]).

On average across 31 OECD countries, 57% of people aged 15 and over consumed vegetables each day in 2021. Countries with the highest rates of vegetable consumption were Korea, New Zealand and the United States, all of which recorded values greater than 90% (Figure 4.9). At the other end of the spectrum, daily vegetable consumption was below 40% in Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Latvia, as well as in accession country Romania. Daily vegetable consumption was higher among women than men in all OECD countries except Mexico. On average across OECD countries, 62% of women consume at least one portion of vegetables per day compared to 52% of men.

While more than one in two adults consume at least one vegetable per day, only one in seven reported consuming the five or more portions of fruit and vegetables per day recommended by WHO. Specifically, in 2019, 15% of adults reported eating five or more portions of fruit and vegetables per day on average across 30 OECD countries with comparable data. Countries with the highest proportions of adults reporting consuming five or more portions of fruit and vegetables per day were Ireland, the United Kingdom, Korea, Israel and the Netherlands (30% or above). Conversely, the proportion was 5% or less in Türkiye and Slovenia, as well as in accession countries Romania and Bulgaria (Figure 4.10). Women are more likely than men to consume five or more portions of fruit and vegetables per day in all OECD countries except Greece and Korea. The gender gap was widest in Denmark, Finland and Ireland.

Regular physical activity is also important for improving mental and musculoskeletal health and reducing the risk of various non-communicable diseases. WHO recommends that adults perform at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity, or at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity (or a combination of both) per week, in different settings, and limit the amount of time spent being sedentary.

In 2019, more than one-third (40%) of adults reported performing at least 150 minutes of non-work-related moderate-to-vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity per week, on average across 32 OECD countries (Figure 4.11). This proportion varied from 10% or less in Türkiye and in accession country Romania to more than 50% in Switzerland, Australia, Norway, the Netherlands, England (United Kingdom), Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, Japan and New Zealand. A greater proportion of men reported performing at least 150 minutes of weekly physical activity than women in all countries except Denmark, Sweden and Iceland. The gender gap was largest in the Czech Republic, France, Japan, the Slovak Republic and Spain (above 10 percentage points). It is estimated that increasing physical activity levels to the WHO recommendation would reduce the burden of disease and prevent over 10 000 premature deaths annually across European countries (OECD/WHO, 2023^[2]).

Definition and comparability

Vegetable consumption is defined as the proportion of adults who consume at least one vegetable per day, excluding juice and potatoes. Data for New Zealand include potatoes. Most countries report national health survey (self-reported) data for the population aged 15 years and over. Data for Korea and New Zealand are derived from questions on the quantity of vegetables consumed each day (rather than frequency questions, e.g. over past week). Values for these countries may therefore be overestimated. Data for the Netherlands refer only to cooked or baked vegetables, which may underestimate consumption.

The indicator on fruit and vegetables consumption refers to the share of adults (aged 18 and over) who report consuming five or more portions per day, excluding fruit or vegetable juices and potatoes, collected from EHIS 2019. In Belgium, 100% pure fresh fruit or vegetable juices are included. Data were complemented for non-EU/EAA countries with national sources. In Canada, the Canadian Community Health Survey collects data for adults aged 18 and over. The data include pure fruit juice, frozen or canned fruits and vegetables, and dried fruit, but excludes fried potatoes. The Korean National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey collects data for adults aged 19 and over. The Swiss Health Survey collects data for adults aged 15 and over who report eating 5 or more portions per day, at least five days per week. In the United Kingdom, the National Diet and Nutrition Survey collects data for those aged 19-64 years.

The indicator on physical activity refers to time spent on non-work-related moderate-to-vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity, collected from EHIS 2019. In Germany, data collection for EHIS took place in 2019 and 2020. Data were complemented for non-EU/EEA countries using the Australian National Health Survey, the Brazilian National Health Survey, the Canadian Health Measures Survey, the English Active Lives Survey, the Japanese Sasakawa Sports Foundation (SSF) National Sports-Life Survey, the Korean National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, the New Zealand Health Survey, the Swiss Health Survey, and the US National Health Interview Survey. The data refer to adults aged 18 and over, except in Australia (18-64), Canada (18-79), England (16 and over), Korea (19 and over), New Zealand and Switzerland (15 and over).

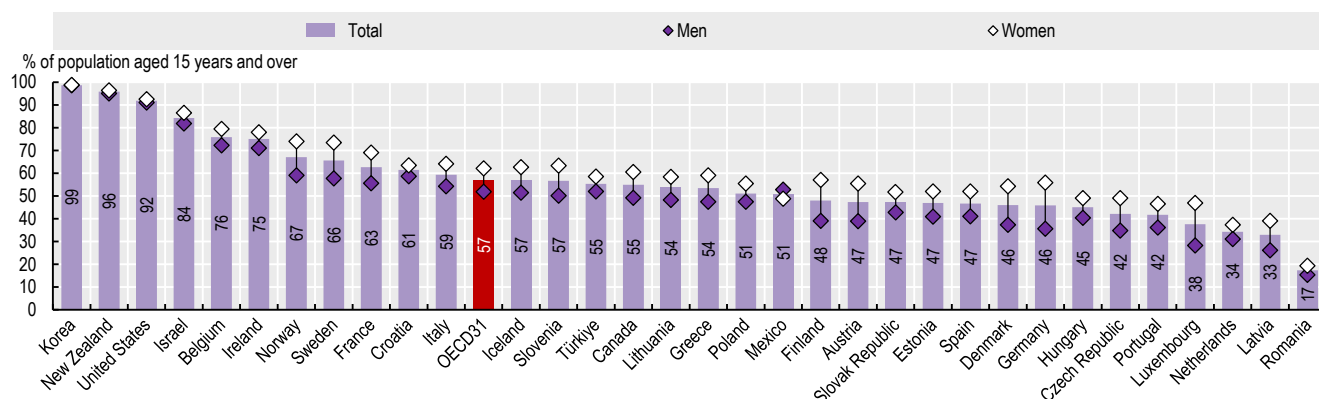
References

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[1]
- OECD/WHO (2023), *Step Up! Tackling the Burden of Insufficient Physical Activity in Europe*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/500a9601-en>.

[2]

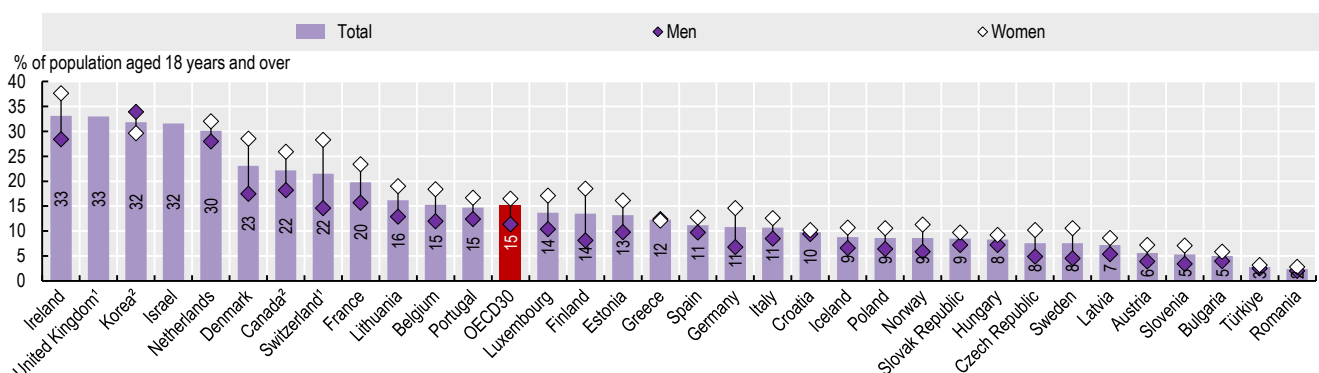
Figure 4.9. Daily vegetable consumption among population aged 15 and over, by sex, 2021 (or nearest year)



Source: OECD Health Statistics 2023.

StatLink <https://stat.link/rdf54q>

Figure 4.10. Daily consumption of five or more portions of fruit and vegetables among adults, by sex, 2019 (or nearest year)

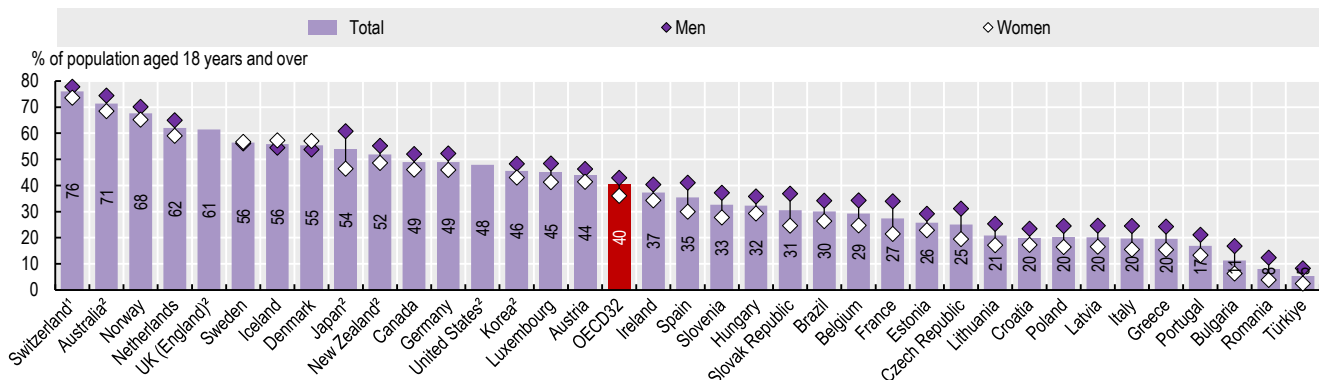


1. 2016-19 data; 2. 2021 data.

Source: Eurostat, EHIS, complemented with national sources for non-EU/EEA countries.

StatLink <https://stat.link/5u7yv3>

Figure 4.11. Spending at least 150 minutes per week on physical activity, by sex, 2019 (or nearest year)



1. 2017 data; 2. 2020-22 data.

Source: Eurostat, EHIS, complemented with national sources for non-EU/EEA countries.

StatLink <https://stat.link/15t27k>



From:
Health at a Glance 2023
OECD Indicators

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/7a7afb35-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2023), "Diet and physical activity", in *Health at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/42de0ab9-en>

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