

## Weight Management Practices of Young Adults: Implications for School Health Promotion Programs

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Healthy nutrition and weight management are among behaviors considered critical to the overall health of children, youth and adults. Poor nutrition and overweight have serious health implications especially for the young adults. Center For Disease Control And Prevention (CDC) includes dietary behaviors and physical inactivity as one of the primary health-risk behaviors among the youth. The primary health -risk behaviors are, tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use, sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, unhealthy dietary behaviors, and physical inactivity plus overweight (CDC MMWR, 2004).

They are known to contribute substantially to “the leading causes of death, disability and social problems among youth and adults in the United States”. (CDC MMWR, 2004, p1). An important goal of public schools in addition to academic development is to, 1) develop a comprehensive approach to reduce the primary health-risk behaviors among students and 2) promote healthy dietary behaviors and vigorous physical activity to reduce prevalence of youth overweight and obesity. CDC maintains, “Healthy weight loss isn't just about a "diet" or "program". It's about an ongoing lifestyle that includes long-term changes in daily eating and exercise habits” (CDC, 2009). However, high school students may see it differently and may use a variety of approaches to maintain a preferred weight. The purpose of this paper was to examine weight management

practices of high school students in the nation. Specifically, the study aimed to determine whether distinct groups of high school students could be identified based on their responses to weight management items on CDC 2009 youth survey.

### Method

The data for the study was from Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (CDC, 2009). Five survey items pertaining to weight management practices of a national sample of 1640 students were analyzed using latent class analysis (LCA) a statistical method for finding distinct subgroups from multivariate categorical data. The results of the analysis showed that a model with three classes or clusters fitted the data well. It indicated that there were three distinct groups of high school students with respect to the combination of approaches (nutrition, exercise, fasting, use of diet pills, laxatives or vomiting) they use to lose or keep from gaining weight. The results of the analysis showed the three groups of students were both statistically and substantively unique. The particular approaches employed by the groups have implications for schools and districts in terms of the programs and pedagogical strategies for promoting healthy lifestyles and values among the young adults.