

Junk food bans reducing students' weight: study

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A recent University of New Brunswick study shows students who don't have access to junk food in schools have seen their body mass index levels slowly and mildly reduce.

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A ban on junk food in schools has helped reduce obesity in students, a UNB study has concluded. But the effects are pretty slim.

Breaking down data from the Canadian Community Health Survey, from 2000 to 2013, the study found each year a student was kept from buying junk food at school resulted in a 0.05 decline in body mass index (BMI) compared to those who were still able to buy junk food at theirs. That averages to about two pounds over the course of five or more years.

The study also found the results were more pronounced in girls.

The data also suggests younger students and high school students without drivers licences saw the greatest benefit from junk food bans.

The health survey from which the numbers were taken is an annual collection of health-related information from across Canada. It includes self-reported weight and height for approximately 65,000 Canadians aged 12 and up.

This study looked at the BMIs from Canadians aged 12-26, including about 22,000 who had been banned from buying junk food at school.

Junk food was banned from schools across New Brunswick in 2005. Several other provinces have since developed similar policies.

Researcher Philip Leonard, a health economist at UNB's New Brunswick Institute for Research, Data and Training, said the findings provide important insight into the impact of the bans.

It also adds value to other research that suggests changing school food environments can have significant effects on student weight, he said.

"[Junk food bans are] one small part. You can't expect this to be the only thing that's going to make all the difference and suddenly we're going to have all of these healthy kids running around. But it does show that this is making a difference," he said.

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