

# Understanding food insecurity and overweight or obesity in Canada

Tim Li, Andrée-Anne Fafard St-Germain. "Understanding food insecurity and overweight or obesity in Canada."  
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## Context

Limited research exists on the relationship between household food insecurity, the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints, and overweight or obesity in Canada. This study helps address this knowledge gap by using population representative data of measured height and weight, rather than self-reported. It also uses propensity score weighting, a statistical technique that better accounts for the systemic differences in the characteristics of those who live in food-secure and food-insecure households. Public health interventions often conflate food insecurity and obesity, so understanding the relationship between these two public health problems is necessary for identifying and implementing appropriate responses.

## Key finding(s) from the research

Household food insecurity is not associated with overweight or obesity among Canadian children and adults, except for adult women in more severely food-insecure households, suggesting that the health implications of food insecurity vary by sex and life stage.

**Population(s) studied:** 44,135 individuals aged 2–64 years living in the 10 provinces

**Research dataset(s) used:** 2004 and 2015 Canadian Community Health Survey-Nutrition

## Policy implications for this research

The finding that food insecurity is not independently associated with overweight or obesity for most Canadians highlights the need to avoid conflating these two problems when designing public health interventions. While some people are simultaneously facing food insecurity and living with overweight or obesity in Canada, trying to tackle both problems together as if they are causally related at the population level appears to be misguided. There is no evidence that interventions around healthy eating are effective at reducing food insecurity. Research suggests that addressing food insecurity requires policy interventions that relieve the underlying income inadequacy and instability.

**Policy area(s) this research can inform:** Children and youth; Health; Income, pensions, spending and wealth

## Read the full article

Fafard St-Germain, A.-A., Hutchinson, J., & Tarasuk, V. (2024). The relationship between household food insecurity and overweight or obesity among children and adults in Canada: A population-based, propensity score weighting analysis. *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism*, 49(4), 473-486. <https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2023-0302>.