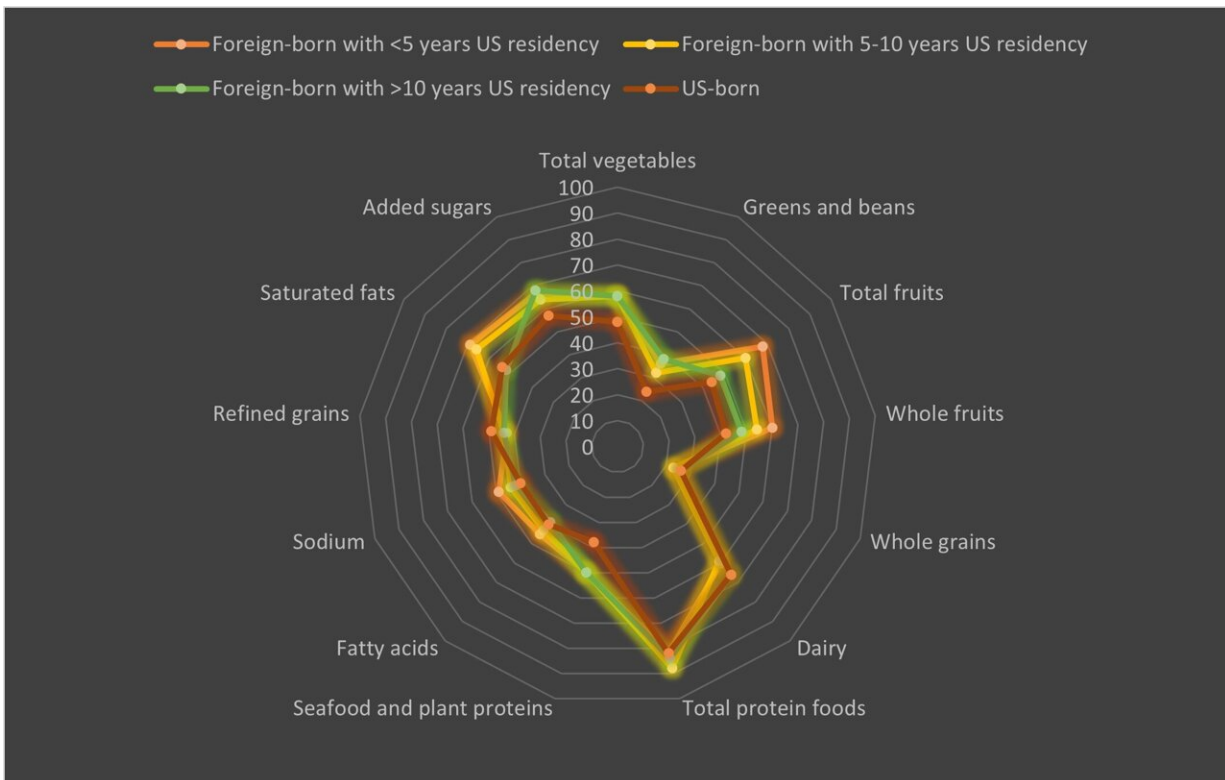


# Study finds being born outside the US is associated with higher diet quality

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This radar plot shows the percentage of the adjusted Healthy Eating Index (HEI) 2015 component score contributing to maximum possible score among U.S.-born and foreign-born adolescents. The percentage of the maximum score of each HEI-2015 component score is represented by a point on the plot, with 0% of maximum score in the center of circle and 100% of maximum score in the outer-most ring. Credit: Alexandra L. MacMillan Uribe, Texas A&M AgriLife Institute for Advancing Health Through Agriculture

A new study has revealed how acculturation—the process of assimilating to a different culture—can affect the dietary patterns of adolescents who move to the U.S.

The researchers found that being born outside the U.S. and living in the U.S. for less time were associated with higher diet quality. The analysis also showed that diet quality was low across all the teens studied, regardless of where they were born or how long they had been in the U.S.

"Looking at dietary acculturation in teens is important because they may experience acculturation differently from adults," said research team leader Alexandra L. MacMillan Uribe, Ph.D., RDN, assistant professor at the Texas A&M AgriLife Institute for Advancing Health Through Agriculture (IHA). "For example, they may be more susceptible to the influence of their peer groups."

MacMillan Uribe will present the findings online at Nutrition 2022 Live Online, the flagship annual meeting of the American Society for Nutrition held June 14-16. The study was also published in *The Journal of Nutrition*.

Although other studies have found an association between acculturation and decreased diet quality among non-U.S.-born adults, less is known about the effects of acculturation on adolescents. A better understanding of dietary acculturation in this age group could be used to develop [health programs](#) that better meet their needs.

In the new study, the researchers analyzed data from more than 6,000 adolescents aged 12 to 19 who participated in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) between 2007 and 2018. The researchers took birthplace and length of U.S. residency information directly from the NHANES data and used the dietary information

collected by the survey to calculate a Healthy Eating Index 2015 component score, which captures how closely a person follows key recommendations from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

The analysis showed that adolescents who live in the U.S. but were born in another country consumed more vegetables, seafood and plant proteins and less added sugar than those born in the U.S. Also, teens who had lived in the U.S. for less than 10 years ate healthier than U.S.-born teens and those living in the country for 10 years or more. Among non-U.S. born study participants, those in the US for less time tended to eat more fruits and less saturated fat.

The researchers say that while today's dietary patterns are likely similar to those captured by the NHANES data, this could change in the future as immigration patterns and dietary patterns in other countries shift.

"Our findings are important to consider when designing health promotion programs for teens, in general," said MacMillan Uribe. "For non-U.S. born teens, programs should celebrate healthy traditional foods while paying special attention to parts of the diet that might be negatively impacted with more time lived in the U.S., like eating fewer fruits or eating more foods high in saturated fat."

The researchers plan to use their findings to develop health promotion programs for non-U.S. born teens and will share their results with precision [nutrition](#) and responsive agriculture research leaders within the IHA to help inform their work. The IHA is a research institute that brings together precision nutrition, responsive agriculture and behavioral research to reduce diet-related chronic disease in a way that considers environmental and economic effects.

**More information:** Alexandra L MacMillan Uribe et al, Association between birthplace and time in the US with diet quality in US

adolescents: Findings from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2007 to 2018, *The Journal of Nutrition* (2022).  
[DOI: 10.1093/jn/nxac117](https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/nxac117)

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