

1

2

3

4

5

6

7



# 13 Health Indicators

8

9

10

11

12

13



1 2 3 4 5 6 7

# 13 Health Indicators

The 13 indicators provide an overall impression of the health of Thais today. The data on nutrition show that 8.1% of school children aged 6-14 are overweight. Many children eat fatty food with more calories than their bodies need. The sorts of foods that children prefer typically contain large amounts of starch, fat, and salt-particularly fast food. Children also drink large quantities of soft drinks. When children choose foods, they don't think about their health.

Sugary foods not only lead to obesity, but also to tooth decay. Many school-age children suffer from dental problems. These children eat excessive quantities of sugar, or do not brush their teeth correctly. In addition, many children have poor access to dental care. The number of rural children with dental problems is increasing, but most do not receive treatment.

Only one in three Thai people exercise sufficiently. Exercise does not necessarily require large amounts of time: the minimum is 30 minutes a day, three days a week. If people are very short of time, or do not have access to equipment and facilities, brisk walks are effective, provided people walk regularly.

Consumption of alcohol has become a major issue for Thai society. Data from The Administrative Committee of substance Abuse Academic Network show that the number of people consuming alcohol between 2001 and 2003, increasing from 1.5 million people to 1.8 million. This increase occurred despite new government policies limiting marketing and advertising. Many people who drink also drive, and accidents from drink driving are a leading cause of death. Alcohol advertising has a major effect on Thai lifestyles. The alcohol marketing industry has developed many strategies for encouraging Thai people to drink more. Many new types of alcoholic beverage have been introduced, and the purchase of alcohol has become more and more convenient.

Unintended pregnancy remains a serious problem in Thailand. Every year around 300,000 women become pregnant unintentionally, of whom 70% carry the pregnancies to term. The remaining 30% choose to have abortions. Lack of knowledge about contraception, and women's limited bargaining power in dealing with their sexual partners contribute to the high rates of unwanted pregnancies. This is particularly true for younger women, or for women who are sexually active but who are not yet ready for family life.



Mental health depends on the care that people receive from the time when they were children. It is important that families show love and attention towards children, and provide guidance to children when necessary. However, only one in three children report that their parents show sufficient love and attention. Many children believe that their parents are too distant, worry too much, or do not love them. One reason why children spend 4-6 hours per day watching television is that their parents are too busy to spend time with them. During the holidays, most children simply stay at home, and do not have any special activities to occupy themselves.

Although most Thai marriages are based on choice, around 3 million Thai women are in marriages where they did not choose their husband or their husband did not choose them. Most marriages begin with a social ceremony or formal registration. About one in ten couples argue frequently.

The report also examines the spiritual health of Thai Buddhists. The religious activity most frequently performed by Thai Buddhists is giving food to monks. Giving food to the monks is the main way in which Buddhists make religious merit in daily life. Making merit helps sustain Buddhism, and benefits both the people giving the food and the monks.

By taking care of their health, people can minimize the risk of illness. However, when illness occurs, Thai people now have universal health insurance, as a basic right. Universal health insurance means that everyone can receive the health care they need. Use of health services has increased markedly since the launch of the policy on 1 October 2001.

The environment is an important influence on the health of Thais. Attempts to boost agricultural exports and compete with other countries have led farmers to use more and more pesticides. Farmers lack sufficient knowledge about the safe and effective use of chemicals. Every year, more and more farmers suffer illnesses caused by pesticides. Water is also causing increased concern. Thai people face problems of water shortages, and droughts and artificial rainmaking are increasing in some areas, even as floods become more common elsewhere.

