Childhood and adolescence are critical stages offering a window of opportunity for interventions to inculcate healthy eating habits to mitigate the occurrence of diet-related chronic diseases in later life associated with poor eating habits in earlier life.

Dietary Intake of Schoolchildren and Adolescents in Developing Countries
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Key insights
In developing countries, the diets of school-age children and adolescents are very limited in diversity. The pattern is characterized by minimal intake of animal foods, fruits and vegetables and high consumption of calorie-rich processed foods. The problem is further exacerbated by the replacement of traditional diets with Western diets in developing countries. Consequently, many children have an inadequate energy intake and are deficient in micronutrients.

Current knowledge
Data on dietary intake are critical for guiding health and nutritional interventions for children and adolescents. The school age and adolescent years comprise a dynamic period of growth and development that forms the basis for health and productivity in later life. This review of the dietary intake of schoolchildren and adolescents (aged 6–19 years) aimed to characterize the dietary patterns and assess the adequacy of nutrient intake in order to identify the effects on public health and nutrition. The analysis was based on 50 studies performed in 42 countries, published from 2000 to 2014.

Practical implications
Public health policies in developing countries must address the problems of over- and undernutrition within the same populations. In school-age children and adolescents, the pattern of energy consumption is not well distributed. These individuals (particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds) often skip breakfast with negative consequences for school performance and health outcomes. Dietary interventions should therefore consider the provision of school meals for improved health and performance. The consumption of processed food items is a major contributing factor to overweight and obesity. This highlights the need for nutrition education across the entire community, including school management, children and parents.

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