

Rates of obesity and overweight have dramatically increased across the United States over the last few decades, although the rate of increase has recently slowed.¹ This report will review the most recent data on rates of obesity and overweight, physical activity and the food environment in New Orleans.

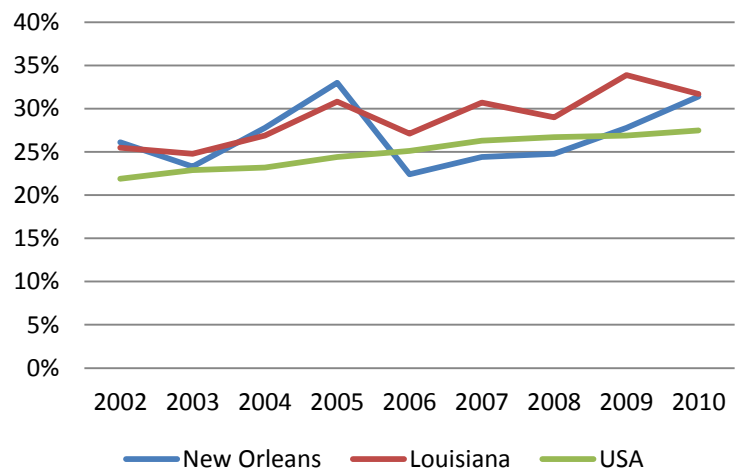
Obesity, Overweight and Chronic Disease

Obesity in New Orleans increased between 2002 and 2010, while the rate of overweight remained stable.

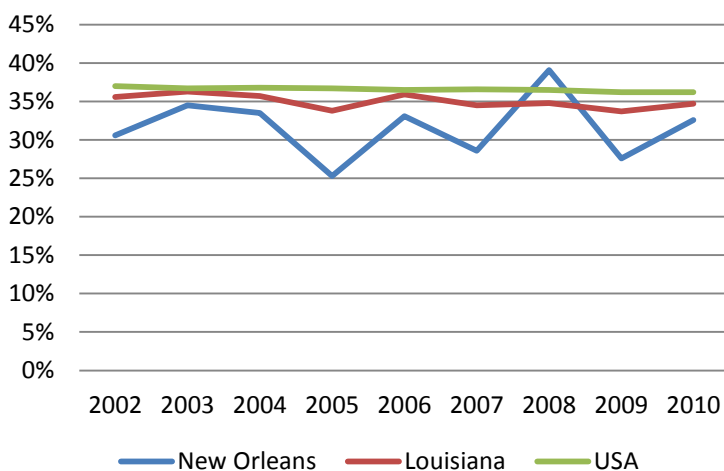
Among adults, obesity is defined as having a Body Mass Index (BMI) over 30, and overweight is defined as a BMI between 25 and 30.²⁰

- In New Orleans, 64% of adults in 2010² and 34% of high school students in 2007¹⁸ were overweight or obese.
- In 2002, 26.1% of adults in New Orleans were obese. In 2010, the rate had risen to 31.4%.
- The obesity rate in New Orleans in 2010 was higher than the national rate (27.5%) and similar to Louisiana's rate (31.7%).²
- While the rate has fluctuated over the last decade, the obesity rate in New Orleans is trending upward.

Obesity Rate, 2002-2010²



Overweight Rate, 2002-2010²



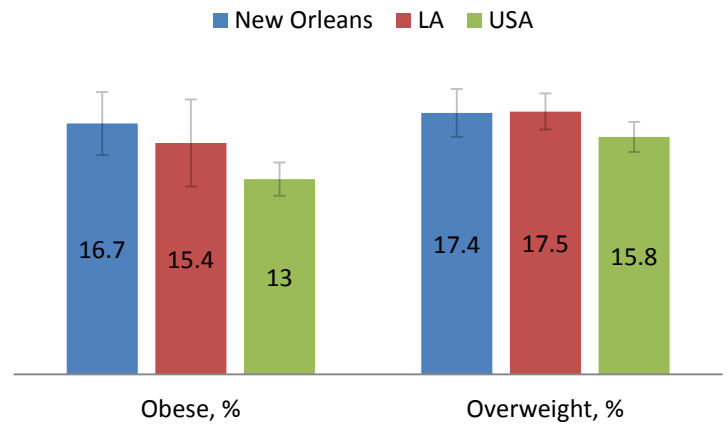
- In 2002, 30.6% of New Orleanians were overweight. In 2010, the rate was 32.6%, lower than the national rate (36.2%) and the rate in Louisiana (34.7%).² Over the last decade, the rate of overweight in New Orleans has generally been lower than the rate in Louisiana and the nation.²
- The rate of overweight in New Orleans varied between 2002 and 2010. Overall, however, the trend has been flat and similar to the trend in Louisiana and the US.²

The rate of obesity in New Orleans high school students is higher than the national average.

In children and youth, obesity is defined as having a Body Mass Index equal to or greater than the 95th percentile for a given age and sex, based on the 2000 CDC growth charts. Overweight is defined as having a BMI greater than or equal to the 85th percentile but less than the 95th percentile, also based on the 2000 CDC growth chart for the appropriate age and sex.⁷

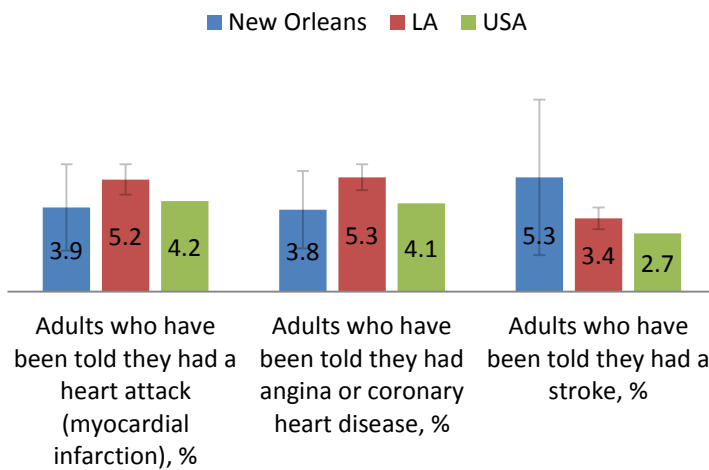
- In 2007, 16.7% of high school students in New Orleans were obese, a significantly higher rate than the US as a whole (13%).

Obesity and Overweight, High School Students (2007)¹⁸

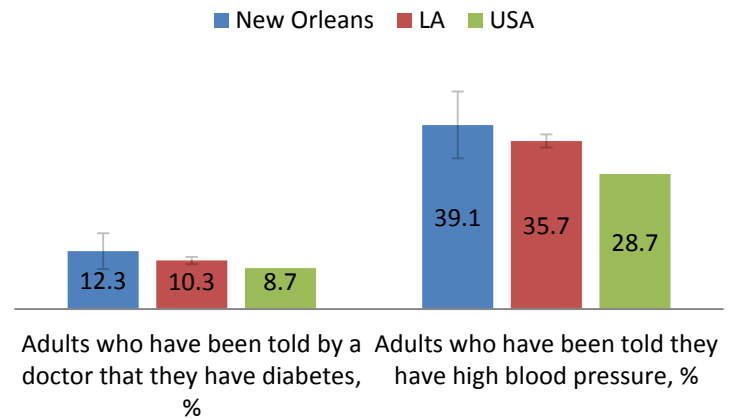


Diabetes and high blood pressure are more common in New Orleans than the rest of the country.

Cardiovascular Disease (2010)²



Diabetes (2010) and High Blood Pressure (2009)²



Cardiovascular disease, diabetes and high blood pressure are some of the health consequences associated with obesity.³

- An estimated 12.3% of adults in New Orleans have been told they have diabetes, 40% higher than the estimate for the United States.²
- The rate of self-reported high blood pressure in New Orleans (39.1%) was significantly higher than the US rate (28.7%).²

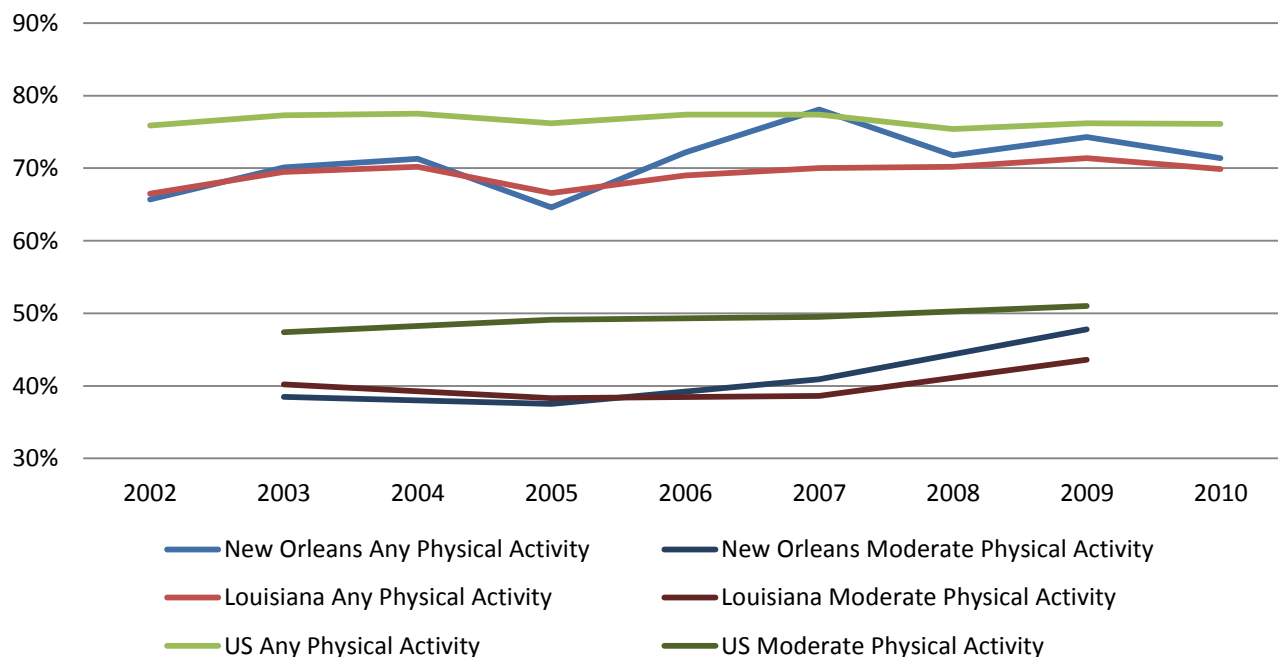
Because the data used for these estimates is from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), which is self-reported, it may understate true rates if people are unaware of their health status. This may especially apply in New Orleans, because more people are uninsured or have low access to health care than in the rest of the country.

Physical Activity

Rates of physical activity among adults in New Orleans and Louisiana lag behind national rates.

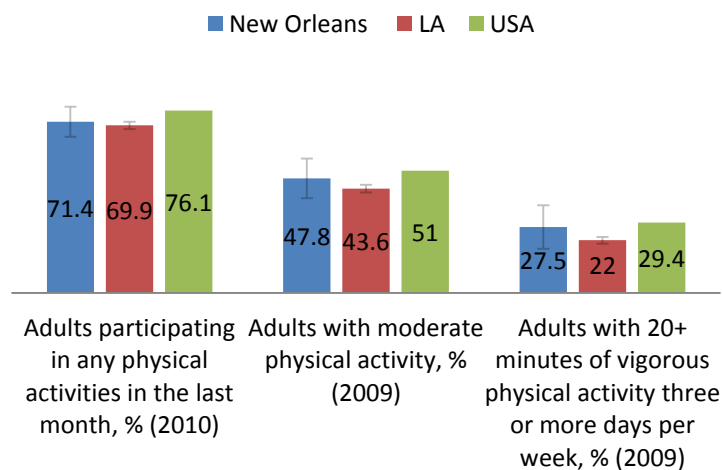
In this chart, "Any physical activity" is the percentage of adults who report participating in any physical activity in the last month. "Moderate physical activity" is the percentage of adults who report 30+ minutes of moderate physical activity five or more days per week, or vigorous physical activity for 20+ minutes three or more days per week. This is similar to the amount recommended in the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans.¹⁵

Physical Activity, 2002-2010



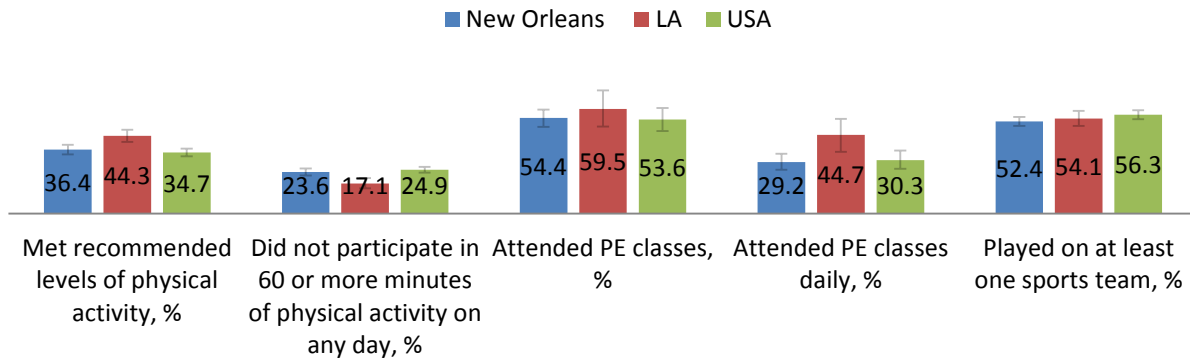
Physical Activity, Adults²

- 48% of adults in New Orleans participate in at least moderate physical activity regularly.²
- Almost 30% of adults in New Orleans did not report participating in any physical activity in the last month.²



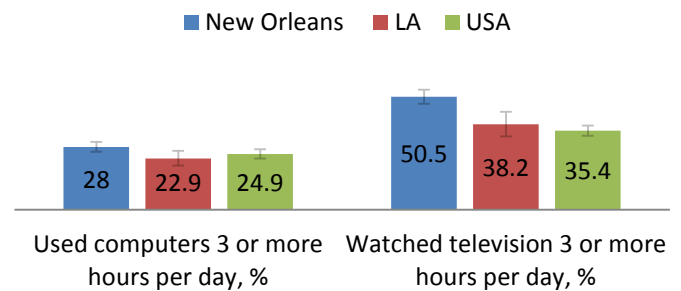
High school students in New Orleans are less likely to meet recommended levels of physical activity than their peers statewide, and are more likely to watch TV for three or more hours a day.

Physical Activity, High School Students (2007)¹⁸



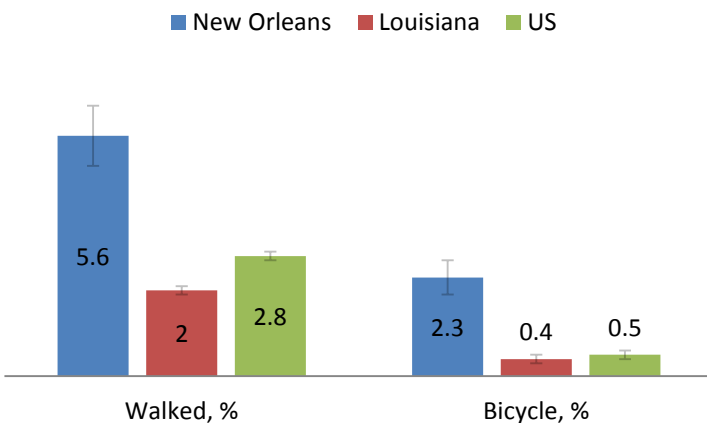
- Only 36% of high school students in New Orleans met recommended levels of physical activity in 2007.¹⁸
- 50.5% of high school students in New Orleans reported watching 3 or more hours of television a day.¹⁸

Sedentary Activity, High School Students (2007)¹⁸



More people in New Orleans use active methods to get to work than the US average.

Means of Transportation to Work (2009-2011)¹⁹



- Significantly more New Orleanians used active methods to commute to work in 2009-2011.¹⁹ The rate of commuters walking to work in New Orleans was twice the national rate and almost three times the rate in Louisiana.¹⁹ The percentage of commuters bicycling to work was almost five times the national and state rates.¹⁹
- Compared to other metro areas (cities larger than 250,000 people) in the US, New Orleans had the 12th highest rate of bicycle commuting and the 15th highest rate of walking to work in 2010. Among cities in the South, New Orleans was third for both bicycle and pedestrian commuting.¹⁶

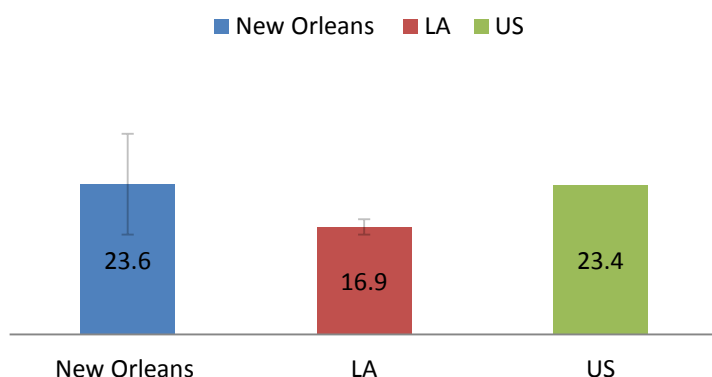
The Food Environment

Healthy eating patterns in New Orleans mirror the nation and are better than the state average.

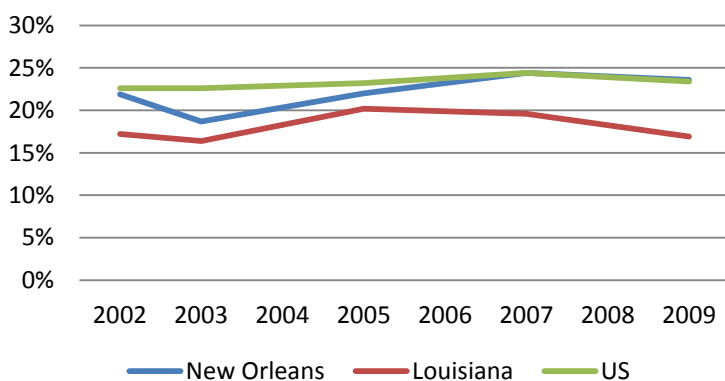
Researchers view the obesity epidemic as the result of changes in the American food environment over the last several decades.⁶ Some of these changes include larger portion sizes and increased consumption of energy-dense food and sugar-sweetened beverages such as soda. In some parts of the country, lack of access to places that sell healthy foods like fruits and vegetables limit the consumption of nutritious food.⁶

- 23.6% of adults in New Orleans reported eating five or more servings of fruits or vegetables per day, according to 2009 BRFSS data. This represents a slight increase from 2002.
- In 2007, 22% of high school students in New Orleans reported eating five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day.¹⁸
- 33.2% of New Orleans high school students reported drinking soda one or more times a day.¹⁸

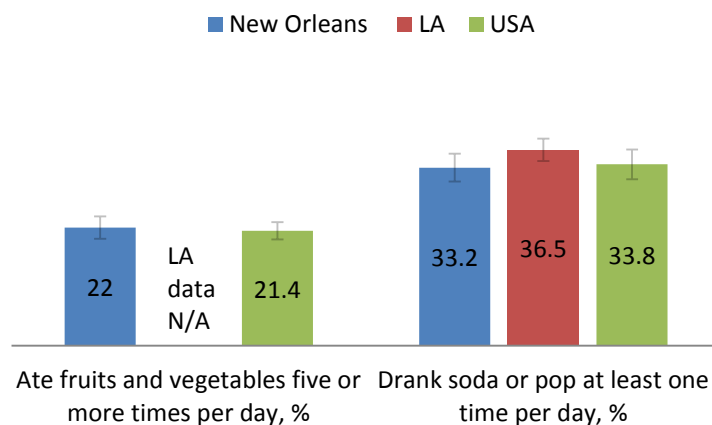
Percentage of Adults Consuming Fruits and Vegetables Five or More Times Per Day (2009)²



Adults Consuming Fruits and Vegetables Five or More Times Per Day, 2002-2009²



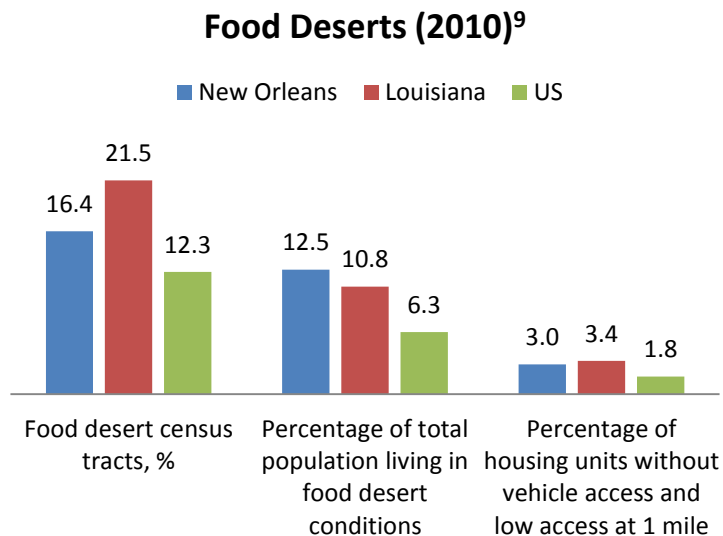
Eating Behavior in High School Students (2007)¹⁸



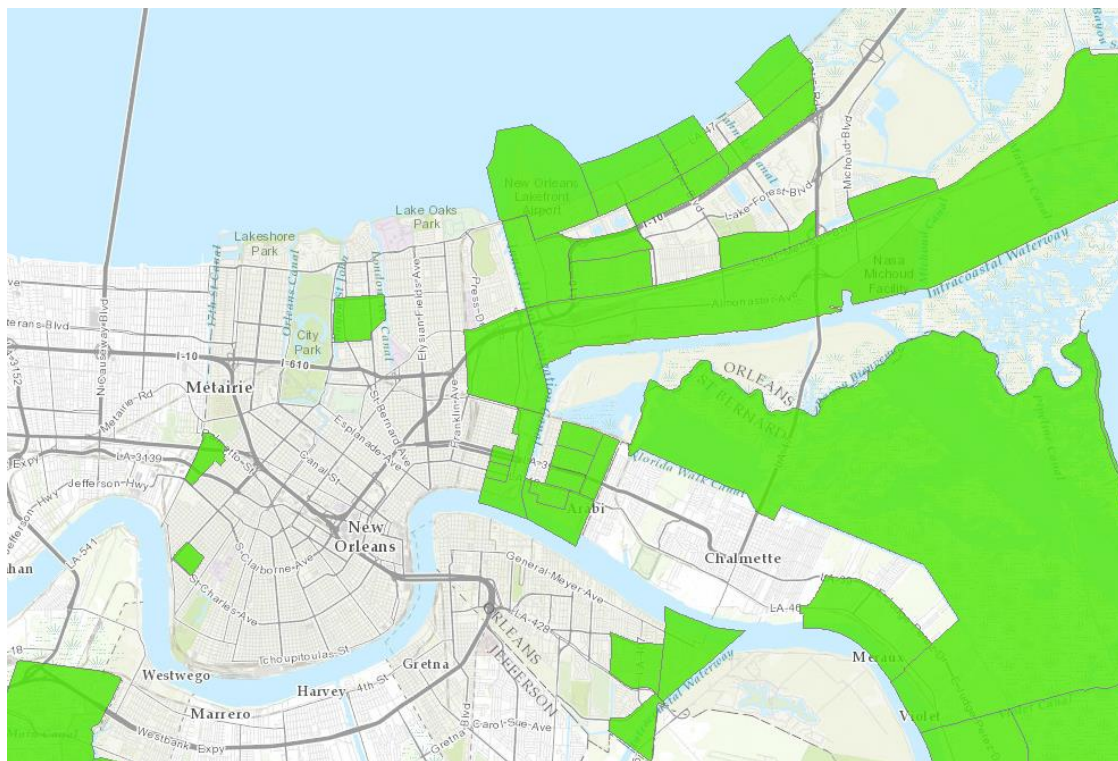
More than one in ten New Orleanians may have limited access to healthy foods.

A "food desert" is generally defined as a low income area with limited access to retailers of healthy foods like fruits and vegetables. Definitions vary, but the USDA has defined a census tract as a "food desert" if it is low income and further than 1 mile (in urban areas) or 10 miles (in rural areas) from a supermarket or other large food retailer.⁸

- Using this definition of a food desert and data from the 2010 Census, the 2006-2010 American Community Survey and 2010 supermarket data, 16.4% of census tracts in New Orleans were food deserts.⁹ These tracts are shown on the map below.
- In New Orleans, approximately 12.5% of the population lives in food desert conditions. 3% of housing units in New Orleans are more than a mile from a large food retailer and do not have access to a vehicle.⁹



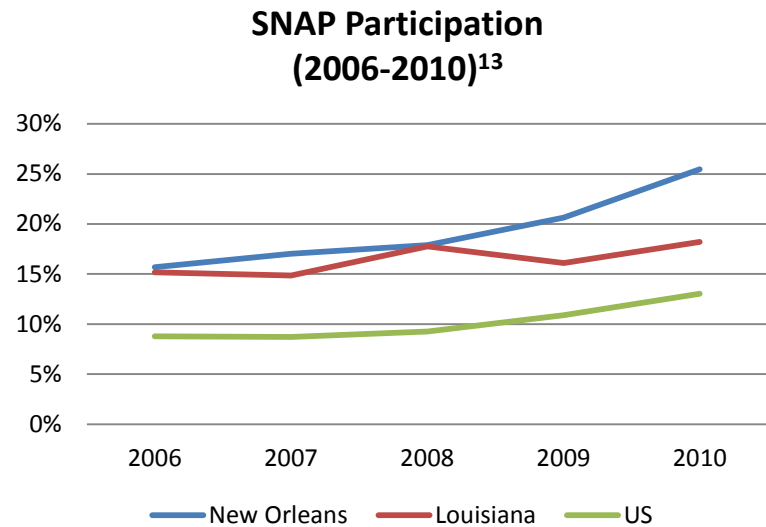
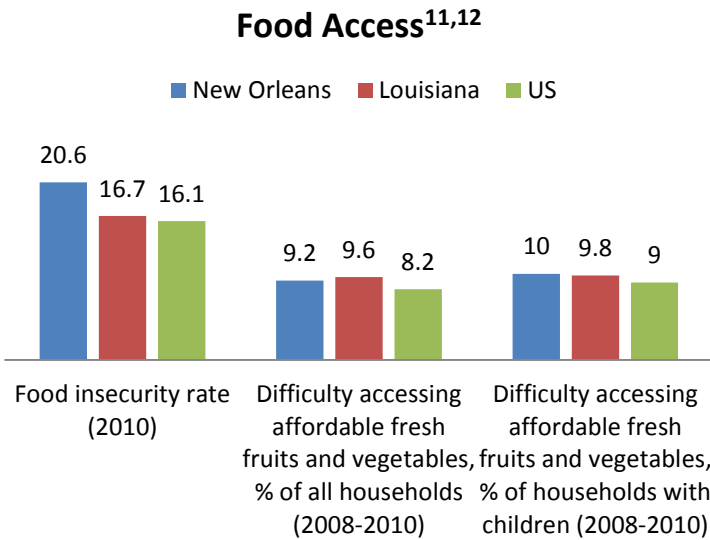
The "food desert" definition used here is an approximation of the real problem of limited access to healthy foods in some neighborhoods. Small stores are not considered, for example, even though some may carry healthy foods. A 2009 paper by researchers at Tulane University looked at the food desert concept in New Orleans and raised the possibility that a better metaphor might be "food swamps": areas where the large amount of unhealthy food that is available drowns out healthier food, an idea that is particularly relevant to the obesity epidemic.¹⁰



Food Desert Census Tracts in New Orleans (2010)⁹

One in five New Orleanians are food insecure and one in four participates in SNAP.

The food desert concept focuses on neighborhoods and the food environment; individual-level food access also plays a role in access to healthy foods.¹² Food insecurity is defined as "the household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food."¹⁴



- In New Orleans, 20.6% of the population was food insecure in 2010.¹¹
- A survey looking specifically at access to fruits and vegetables found that 9.2% of households and 10% of households with children in the New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) had difficulty accessing affordable fruits and vegetables.¹²
- Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) is high in New Orleans, and growing: 25.5% of the population participated in 2010, compared to 15.7% in 2006.¹³

Implications

The epidemic of obesity has brought with it significant costs, both to individuals and to society. For individuals, obesity and overweight are associated with higher risk of coronary heart disease, stroke and chronic diseases such as Type II diabetes.³ At the societal level, obesity and overweight are associated with higher medical costs and lost productivity. These costs were estimated to total \$270 billion a year in the US⁴; in Louisiana, medical costs alone were estimated to be \$2.3 billion for one year.⁵ Between 2000 and 2005, an estimated 20.6% of annual US health care spending went towards conditions related to obesity.⁶

In the last few years, efforts to curb this epidemic have focused on prevention, and particularly on preventing childhood obesity. These prevention efforts focus on making healthy choices easier by improving the healthy food environment and creating an environment supportive of physical activity.⁶ The New Orleans Health Department has taken action by launching the Fit NOLA partnership with the goals of both eliminating childhood obesity and making New Orleans one of the top ten fittest cities in the United States by 2018, the city's 300th birthday.¹⁷

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