

The Healthy Eating Index (HEI) provides an overall summary of the types and quantities of food individuals consume and their compliance with recommended dietary practices. The HEI consists of 10 components, each representing different aspects of a healthful diet. Five components measure the degree to which a person’s diet conforms to serving recommendations for five major food groups, four components assess compliance with specific dietary recommendations, and one measures variety in the diet.

Food stamp participants tend to have somewhat lower HEI scores – both overall and for many components – than low-income non-participants and higher income individuals. But the overall similarities between food stamp participants and others are more striking than the differences. The average HEI scores indicate that the diets of most individuals in all three groups – roughly 90 percent – need improvement. And all three groups tend to consume too few fruits and vegetables: average HEI fruit and vegetable component scores are low, and few people meet the recommended standards.

	HEI Component Scores			Percent Meeting Recommendation		
	Food Stamp	Other Low-Income	Higher Income	Food Stamp	Other Low-Income	Higher Income
Overall HEI	60.2	61.8	64.8	n/a	n/a	n/a
Grains	6.3	6.5	6.8	20.9	22.5	23.4
Vegetables	5.0	5.4	5.8	19.3	23.1	26.6
Fruits	3.0	3.5	4.1	12.9	18.6	19.8
Milk	5.8	6.1	6.8	31.2	35.1	41.0
Meat	7.0	6.7	6.8	35.0	32.7	33.7
Total Fat	6.6	6.5	6.5	35.2	36.0	34.0
Saturated Fat	6.2	6.1	6.1	37.8	37.6	36.9
Cholesterol	7.3	7.5	7.9	65.3	65.8	70.9
Sodium	6.4	6.4	6.0	39.2	37.9	32.6
Variety	6.6	7.1	8.0	39.8	46.3	58.2

Source: Fox and Cole (2004) [*Nutrition and Health Characteristics of Low-Income Populations*](#) (Volume I). Tabulations based on National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 1988-94.

Note: Maximum score equals 100 (10 on each component).