

Overweight children have different eating patterns than normal weight children

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Overweight children reported more frequent intake of healthy foods such as fruit, vegetables, fish, brown bread and potatoes as well as low-energy cheese and yoghurt compared with normal weight children. This comes from a recent study from researchers at Telemark University College, Norway and the Norwegian Institute of Public Health.

The study showed that:

- Overweight children drank juice and artificially sweetened [soft drinks](#) more often, while the normal weight children drank carbonated drinks and ate [unhealthy foods](#) and [processed foods](#) such as burgers, sausages, biscuits, processed pizza and sweets.
- The results suggest that both parents and children have increased awareness of food choices when children are overweight.
- The study also showed that [overweight children](#) were less physically active and were more likely to have obese parents than normal weight children.

"It is positive that parents and children emphasise [healthy food](#) choices. However, it is important to note that the amount of healthy foods must be adapted to a child's activity level to limit further [weight gain](#)," said researcher Anne Lise Brantsæter at the NIPH.

"Obesity is a growing problem that can have unfortunate consequences for the children both physically and mentally. There are many contributing factors to obesity and it is important that both parents and children are given good guidance and support early on," added Brantsæter.

How was the study conducted?

The study of eating habits and obesity included 924 fourth graders (9-10 year olds) in the county of Telemark. Nearly half of all fourth graders in the county of Telemark participated when the survey was conducted in 2007. This study has been followed up with new measurements and questions in 2010, and the results from the latest study are now being analysed.

Children's eating habits were assessed by asking how often the child had eaten a variety of foods, both for meals and snacks. The researchers used this to identify eating patterns that reflect which foods are often eaten together. This way of studying diet provides a more comprehensive picture than investigating the intake of individual foods separately.

Public health nurses at the schools weighed and measured the children, while their parents answered questions about their own weight, education and occupation in addition to their children's eating habits and activity level.

The analysis takes into account other factors relevant to children's eating patterns and weight, i.e., parents' educational level, income and employment, and if the parents themselves were overweight.

More information: IM Oellingrath, MV Svendsen, AL Brantsæter. Eating patterns and overweight in 9- to 10-year-old children in Telemark County, Norway: a cross-sectional study. *European Journal of Clinical*

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