

## New study examines what could predict children's snack choices

May 7 2012

---

Attitudes, relationships, intentions and personal behavior control are all factors that could affect a child's decision in either reaching for an apple or grabbing a bag of chips, according to a new study out of the University of Cincinnati. The research by Paul Branscum, assistant professor of health and exercise science at the University of Oklahoma, and Manoj Sharma, a University of Cincinnati professor of health promotion and education, is published in the *International Quarterly of Community Health Education*.

The study focused on 167 fourth-and-fifth-grade elementary schoolchildren in the Midwest over a 24-hour reporting period. The authors found that snacking represented a large part of the children's daily calorie intake. Overall, the group reported consuming an average of approximately 300 [calories](#) from high-calorie, low-nutrition foods such as chips, [candy](#) and cookies – nearly 17 percent of their daily caloric needs. They reported eating only 45 calories from fruits and vegetables combined.

Students were asked to report all snack foods and drinks that they had eaten in a 24-hour period. The information was then entered into the USDA National Nutrient Database to calculate the consumption of high-calorie snacks as well as calories from fruits and vegetables.

The survey examined a number of behaviors in relation to snacking, such as whether the [children](#) thought that choosing lower-calorie snacks was a good idea, whether they were confident in knowing how to choose lower

calorie snacks, and if they felt any social pressure from parents, teachers or friends in choosing lower calorie snack foods. The study found that intentions (stemming from attitude, social connections and behavioral control) predicted the children's direction toward healthy or unhealthy snacking.

The study found some significant differences in snack choices among gender and ethnicity. Girls reported eating more high-calorie snacks (348.3 calories) than boys (238.8 calories). African-American children reported consuming the least high-calorie snacks (221.6 calories), compared with Hispanic children (297.6 calories), white children (282.3 calories) and Asian children (280.8 calories). The Hispanic and Asian children also reported consuming more of the healthier fruit and vegetable snacks than the white and African-American children.

Out of the 167-person study group, 59 percent were female, 41 percent were male, 48 percent were Caucasian, 16 percent were African-American, 19 percent were Hispanic, three percent identified as Asian and 13 percent identified as other (multiple race or ethnicity).

The report suggests that part of the increases in childhood snacking could be stemming from the growing numbers of children who skip breakfast. Children are also more likely to have greater control over choosing their snacks (and making bad choices), versus what is served at dinner. Higher calorie snacks such as chips and cookies are less filling – making it easier to over consume them – compared with higher-fiber fruits and vegetables.

The study suggested that in the battle against childhood obesity, [snack foods](#) should be of particular concern because they're relatively cheap and easy for children to purchase.

The researchers say the results of the survey further support the need for

more health education programs for elementary school children in fighting childhood obesity, in an effort to help children make more positive health choices such as selecting healthier snacks.

"Children may not comprehend long-term benefits or consequences of obesity, such as developing chronic conditions in adulthood, but it's likely that they would understand immediate benefits of a healthier lifestyle, such as being better able to play team or individual sports," Branscum says.

The authors add that targeting obesity in children is especially important to head off future health threats such as diabetes and heart disease, as well as future skyrocketing costs in healthcare as a result of the growing rate of obesity.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

Citation: New study examines what could predict children's snack choices (2012, May 7)  
retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-05-children-snack-choices.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--