

# Tell me where you're from and I'll tell you what tastes you prefer

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Not all children have the same preference for chips, sweets or sugary drinks.  
Credit: Sílvio Gabriel Spanenberg

Children love fatty and sugary foods. Or do they? New research contradicts the idea that all children under the age of ten have the same taste in food and highlights the importance of the country of residence, culture and age in these preferences.

Until now the scientific community believed that children's favourite foods were chips, sweets and [sugary drinks](#), the very foods that are the most damaging to their health.

However, a new study published in the *Food Quality and Preference* journal concludes that this hypothesis is not entirely true after analysing whether or not all children have the same preference for sugar and fat, considered to be a cause of [excess weight](#) and obesity for all ages.

During the research, which forms part of the Identification and prevention of Dietary and lifestyle induced [health Effects](#) In Children and infantS (IDEFICS) project, the flavour preferences of more than 1,700 children between six and nine years old from eight European countries (Italy, Estonia, Cyprus, Belgium, Sweden, Germany, Hungary and Spain) were examined.

Using sensory tests, the authors were able to determine the children's taste for fat, sugar, salt and monosodium glutamate, a flavour enhancer that corresponds to the fifth basic taste, known as 'umami'.

"The results were surprising", Silvia Bel-Serrat, the only Spanish co-author of the study who works in the University of Zaragoza, explained to SINC. "Although we often tend to think that children share a common [predisposition](#) towards fats and sugar, we observed that the preferences of children from different countries were not at all similar."

### **German and Cypriots in relation to biscuits**

More than 70% of the German children preferred biscuits with added fat compared to only 35% of the children from Cyprus. Conversely, the majority of the German children preferred plain [apple juice](#), while the Swedish, Italian and Hungarian children opted for the version with added sugar or flavours.

"This means that flavour preferences are influenced by cultural factors, but we also see that these tastes are developed in a similar way as children grow up", stated Anne Lanfer, the study's main author and researcher at the Institute for Prevention Research and Epidemiology in Bremen (Germany). Thus, in all eight countries the older children had a higher preference for sugar and salt than the younger ones.

The research team also assessed whether tastes varied according to the child's gender, taste threshold, parent's level of education, feeding patterns during their early years, time spent watching television and parents' use of food as a reward.

The results showed that there was no link between these factors and the preference for sugar, fat, salt and umami among the children, despite the fact that an influence on flavour preference had previously been attributed to such factors.

## **Refining prevention**

The researchers believe the study has important implications. "There is a tendency to undertake uniform dietary prevention programmes across [European countries](#). However, flavour preferences vary from one country to another and the same programme will not be equally effective in all countries," Lanfer pointed out.

For example, promoting the consumption and distribution of apple juice with no added sugar would be more effective in Germany, where there is a high level of acceptance, than in Hungary, where the majority of children prefer juice with added [sugar](#).

Furthermore, knowing that children's preferences change as they grow older, "there is still hope that [children](#)'s flavour preferences are not stable and can be influenced by their parents and the surrounding

environment", the authors concluded.

**More information:** Lanfer, A. et al. Indicadores de las preferencias de sabor en niños europeos: Estudio IDEFICS, *Food Quality and Preference* 27 (2013) 128-136.

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