

Screening Aussie toddlers' diets

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A Flinders University researcher has developed a new risk assessment tool to identify Australian toddlers with poor diets.

The Toddler Dietary Questionnaire (TDQ) is a simple [screening tool](#) that provides information on toddlers' dietary intakes to determine children who are at-risk of short and long-term health problems as a result of unhealthy eating habits.

Developed by Flinders PhD candidate Lucinda Bell, the questionnaire uses a scoring system to measure toddlers' overall dietary consumption against the current Dietary Guidelines for Australian Children, thereby identifying poor [dietary patterns](#).

"The TDQ looks at total food groups rather than individual foods or meals," Miss Bell, based in Nutrition and Dietetics, said.

"Instead of focusing on whether toddlers are eating oranges or apples the TDQ looks for patterns in their overall diet, both in terms of core foods which are essential for health and high fat, high sugar foods, to identify those at-risk," she said.

The 19-item TDQ was tested in a sample of 111 Australian parents last year, with the results showing it was just as effective in determining toddlers' risk as a 50-item questionnaire which participants completed as part of the evaluation.

Miss Bell said the TDQ addressed a gap in the assessment and

monitoring of toddlers' diets.

"Many assessment tools are quite laborious for respondents because they tend to look at individual foods rather than total consumption," she said.

"As well as taking up more time, assessments focused on individual foods are much harder to compare with Australian dietary guidelines, which are based on total food groups.

"The TDQ fills a gap in this area because it's a simple tool that can rapidly and accurately assess dietary risk with a smaller number of questions."

With childhood obesity on the rise, Miss Bell said the tool could be used at both an individual and population level.

"Current dietary intakes of toddlers are not ideal – we know they're not having enough fruit and vegetables and are having too much high fat, high [sugar foods](#).

"Now that we have this [tool](#) we can apply it in a clinical setting to identify at-risk Australian children who require intervention to improve their diet and reduce diet-related diseases later in life.

"It can also be used in a research setting to enhance our understanding of how [toddlers](#)' dietary risk influences health outcomes, in particular [childhood obesity](#)."

Provided by Flinders University

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