

As kids get older, snacks get poorer

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American kids snack about three times a day on average, totaling about a third of their daily calorie count. But whether those snacks are good choices has a lot to do with the child's age, according to a new study.

E. Whitney Evans, N13, and colleagues at the Friedman School asked 176 students at four Boston-area schools on two separate occasions to recall what they had eaten the previous day. The researchers then assessed the nutritional quality of each meal or snack and scored them based on the Healthy Eating Index (HEI), which measures how closely the diet adheres to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Evans, who did the research under the guidance of senior author Aviva Must, N87, N92, professor and chair of the Department of Public Health and Community Medicine at Tufts School of Medicine, found that the younger children—the 9- to 11-year-olds—increased their HEI score with each meal or snack they consumed. Not so with the adolescents: while eating three meals a day contributed to the overall quality of their diets, the 12- to 15-year-olds brought the average healthiness of their daily diets down with each between-meal nosh.

The authors speculate that the adolescents may be making more of their own food decisions, particularly at [snack](#) time, than their younger peers.

Evans, who is now a postdoctoral research fellow at Brown University and the Weight Control and Diabetes Center at Miriam Hospital in Rhode Island, suggests that parents cement good snacking habits when kids are young and reinforce them when kids reach middle school. That

way, when their allowance is burning a hole in their pocket, maybe they'll be thinking fruit and yogurt, not chips and fries.

Provided by Tufts University

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