

# Hungry or not, kids will eat treats

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New QUT study find toddlers can't resist tasty treats

(Medical Xpress)—Even though they are not hungry, children as young as three will find high-energy treats too tempting to refuse, new QUT research has found.

In a study of three and four year olds, 100 per cent of children opted for a sweet or savory snack despite eating a filling healthy lunch only 15 minutes prior.

Nutrition researcher Holly Harris, from QUT's Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation, said the results highlighted the health risks for children frequently confronted with an abundance of energy-dense, high-

calorie foods.

Ms Harris's study, published in the journal *Eating Behaviors*, looked at young children's eating habits in the absence of being hungry and how parental feeding control impacted those behaviours in both girls and boys.

"Of the 37 children who took part in the study, all children displayed eating in the absence of hunger, even though more than 80 per cent reported being full or very full just 15 minutes earlier," Ms Harris said.

"An impaired ability to respond to signs of feeling full and being unable to self-control food intake in an environment where [children](#) are frequently faced with high-energy foods is likely to have undesirable ramifications on a child's energy balance and weight status."

Ms Harris said pressure by mothers to eat was also positively linked to higher levels of snack food intake in the absence of being hungry, but this was a result found only with boys.

"Mothers who reported that they typically pressured their boys to eat during meal times, had boys who also ate more snacks when they were no longer hungry," she said.

"This adds weight to the argument that boys' and girls' eating behaviours may be influenced or expressed in different ways.

"For example, in boys it may be that controlled feeding practices such as encouraging boys to finish everything on their plate may compromise their ability to determine their own hunger.

"Therefore they may be more likely to eat and overeat in the presences of highly palatable snacks.

"So forcing [boys](#) to eat their breakfast, lunch or dinner may impact their ability to self-regulate their snack food intake as well."

She said when mothers pressured their girls to eat it did not have the same impact on their child's snack consumption.

Ms Harris said people were born with a capacity to self-regulate their food intake.

"Infants will not consume energy in excess of what their body requires. Internal hunger and satiety signals are relayed to the brain and tell infants when to stop and start eating," she said.

"But as we grow older, we become increasingly aware of the abundance and rewarding value of food and in turn our ability to respond appropriately to our appetite may diminish.

"In a society which constantly promotes over-consumption from convenient, energy-dense foods a susceptibility to respond to environmental food cues over appetite cues may lead to an imbalance in energy and [food intake](#) and undesirable weight gain.

"Preserving this ability to self-regulate energy intake early in life may be the key to resisting environmental stimuli to eat, later in life."

**More information:** Holly Harris, Kimberley M. Mallan, Smita Nambiar, Lynne A. Daniels, "The relationship between controlling feeding practices and boys' and girls' eating in the absence of hunger," *Eating Behaviors*, Volume 15, Issue 4, December 2014, Pages 519-522, ISSN 1471-0153, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2014.07.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2014.07.003).

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