

Research reveals playing video games before meals contributes to lower calorie intake

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A new study led by Ryerson nutrition professor Nick Bellissimo suggests that when boys who have a healthy body weight play a quick video game before a meal, they tend to eat less and are happier.

The next time your son asks you if he can play a quick video game before lunch, don't feel guilty about saying yes. A new Ryerson University study suggests playing video games before meals helps teenage boys stay healthy and happy.

Although research literature suggests that sedentary activities, especially those involving screen time, are unhealthy and stimulate children's

appetite, says Ryerson nutrition professor Nick Bellissimo, but his study found that when the boys played Angry Birds, they consumed, on average, 50 fewer calories than when they didn't engage in any activities.

"This finding is the first time anyone has shown that playing video games contributes to lower energy intake at the next meal," says Bellissimo. "In fact, this result is forcing us to re-examine everything we thought we knew about the effect of screen exposure on eating behavior in children within the healthy body weight range."

Bellissimo invited a group of boys to participate in the study held at Ryerson's FIRST (Food Intake Regulation Satiety Testing) lab, the only one of its kind in Canada dedicated to researching childhood nutrition. The study involved a group of boys, ranging from nine to 14 years old, who had a healthy body weight. During four morning visits to the lab, the boys either played 30 minutes of Angry Birds or sat quietly for a half hour. The boys were then served a pizza lunch and ate until they were comfortably full. Each boy's mood was also measured with the use of special scales developed by the researchers upon arrival at the study site and after the meal was finished.

In addition, boys who arrived at the lab happier and more excited tended to eat less after playing Angry Birds. "If you're in a good mood and/or playing a [video game](#), that seemed to keep kids from overeating at the next meal," notes Bellissimo.

What about parents who are worried about the effect gaming has on their child's health? Bellissimo says as long as the child is physically active and is involved in a variety of activities, parents shouldn't worry.

"If your kids are active and consume a generally healthy diet, 30 minutes of playing video games is not going to cause them to overeat. In fact, it may help them consume fewer calories and maintain a healthy [body](#)

weight, although future work in this area is required to confirm this finding."

The study is part of a larger series Bellissimo is conducting to determine the impact different screen activities have on children's appetites. As part of his future research, Bellissimo will explore the physiological and psychological factors that cause boys to eat less after playing video games. He is also interested in experimenting with more animated games that may elicit a wider spectrum of emotions from children to see its effect on their appetite.

Bellissimo has conducted previous studies with girls who have healthy body weights and children who are obese, and found that playing video games before a meal doesn't have any significant impact on their appetite afterwards.

Provided by Ryerson University

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