

Skipping meals increases children's obesity and cardio metabolic risk

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Children who skip main meals are more likely to have excess body fat and an increased cardiometabolic risk already at the age of 6 to 8 years, according to a Finnish study. A higher consumption of sugary drinks, red meat and low-fat margarine and a lower consumption of vegetable oil are also related to a higher cardiometabolic risk. "The more of these factors are present, the higher the risk," says Ms Aino-Maija Eloranta, MHS, who presented the results in her doctoral thesis at the University of Eastern Finland.

The dietary habits, eating behaviour and dietary determinants of excess body adiposity and cardiometabolic risk were investigated in a population sample of 512 Finnish girls and boys 6 to 8 years of age participating in the Physical Activity and Nutrition in Children (PANIC) Study. Cardiometabolic risk was assessed by a continuous metabolic risk score computed using Z-scores of waist circumference, fasting serum insulin, fasting plasma glucose, triglycerides and high-density lipoprotein cholesterol and the mean of systolic and [diastolic blood pressure](#).

Children who skipped meals and ate more protein were more likely to have excess body fat. Uncontrolled eating behaviour, such as eating fast, emotional overeating and a lower satiety responsiveness were also associated with higher body adiposity.

The study also showed that most children's diet was far from ideal. Less than half of the children ate all three main meals - breakfast, lunch and dinner - every day. Instead, snacks were a major source of energy and

sucrose. A minority of the children consumed vegetables, fruit and berries as recommended. As many as a quarter of the children consumed sugary drinks daily.. The intakes of [saturated fat](#), sucrose and salt were higher and the intakes of dietary fibre, vitamin D and iron were lower than recommended among the children.

"Based on the findings, sticking to regular meals seems to be crucial for preventing overweight and cardiometabolic diseases already in childhood," Ms Eloranta says. In addition, parents need to provide their [children](#) with better dietary choices: regular-fat [vegetable-oil](#) margarines and vegetable oils instead of low-fat margarines, fat-free milk and water instead of [sugary drinks](#), and more fish instead of [red meat](#) at meals.

The results were originally published in *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, *International Journal of Obesity* and *European Journal of Nutrition*.

Provided by University of Eastern Finland

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