

Kiwi kids consume five unhealthy snacks a day

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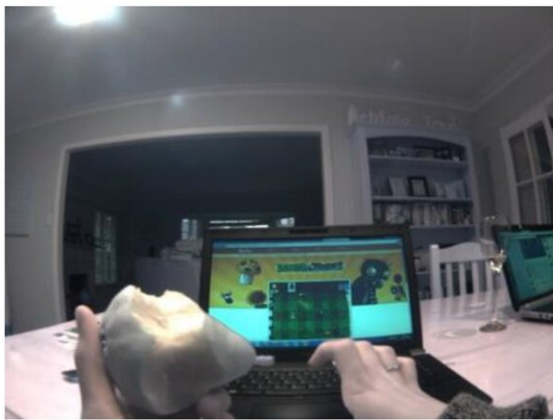


Fig 1. (Top left) snacking on pear at home; (Top right) snacking on chocolate in school; (Bottom left) snacking on candy on street; (Bottom right) snacking on popcorn at home. Credit: *Nutrients* (2020). DOI: 10.3390/nu13010103

On average, 12-year-old children snack on unhealthy food and beverages five times a day, according to new research from the University of Otago.

The average child snacked on confectionary, [salty snacks](#), cookies/cakes and sugary drinks at least once a day. Healthier snacks, such as fruit, were consumed occasionally, although for every [healthy snack](#) consumed, [children](#) ate 2.5 unhealthy snacks.

Lead researcher Ryan Gage, of the University of Otago, Wellington, says current guidelines recommend that children consume snacks low in fat, sugar and salt.

"Our research shows that most snacking episodes involve unhealthy items, and that healthier options like fruit, vegetables, nuts and milk being consumed less frequently."

The research was funded by the Cancer Society of New Zealand, and published in the journal *Nutrients*.

Unhealthy snacks contribute to obesity and increased risk of some cancers. New Zealand currently has the second highest rate of childhood obesity among OECD member countries. One in 10 New Zealand children are obese, and a further one in five are overweight.

The research is further analysis of the innovative Kids'Cam research, where children wore automated cameras. A selection of 168 children between the ages of 11 and 13 from 16 schools in the Wellington region of New Zealand took part in the study. Children wore the cameras over a four-day period, which recorded photographs every seven seconds.

The research found that children consumed more unhealthy snacks than healthy snacks in all settings, including 15x more unhealthy snacks in

public spaces and 2.4x more [unhealthy snacks](#) in schools.

Co-author Professor Louise Signal, of the University of Otago, Wellington, says the findings build on previous research outlining the unhealthy nature of children's [food](#) environments.

"Children live in an obesogenic environment, one which encourages unhealthy eating.

"Previous research shows that children are exposed to 27 junk food ads a day, and that most schools in New Zealand do not have healthy [school](#) food policies."

Christina McKerchar, Hauora Māori Health Lecturer, at the University of Otago, Christchurch, agrees.

"There is a high density of convenience stores near schools in NZ, which overwhelmingly promote unhealthy foods to children through placement, price offers and signage.

"There are limited affordable healthy choices available for children and their caregivers to purchase in New Zealand."

The authors call for [urgent action](#) to reduce obesogenic food environments in New Zealand.

"We need to create environments where healthy eating is the easy choice," Gage says.

"There are several feasible, effective strategies that would greatly improve children's snacking behaviours, including comprehensive healthy food policies in school, restrictions on junk food marketing and taxes on junk food and sugar-sweetened beverages, as recently initiated

in Tonga."

The article, "The Frequency and Context of Snacking among Children: An Objective Analysis Using Wearable Cameras," is published in the journal *Nutrients*.

More information: Ryan Gage et al. The Frequency and Context of Snacking among Children: An Objective Analysis Using Wearable Cameras, *Nutrients* (2020). [DOI: 10.3390/nu13010103](https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13010103)

Provided by University of Otago

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