

# Free fruit in schools did not have an effect on obesity among children and youth

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The scheme providing free fruit to schools lasted from 2007 to 2014 and was mainly introduced to improve learning in school through a better

diet. Among other possible positive effects of the scheme was a reduced prevalence of obesity.

"After doing this research, we cannot see that [school](#) fruit has any effect on obesity among children and young people," says Ph.D. Research Fellow Bente Øvrebø at the Department of Sport Science and Physical Education at UiA.

The findings were recently published in the scientific journal *Plos Medicine*.

The school fruit scheme was a government initiative at all of Norway's lower secondary and combined primary and lower secondary schools. The initiative consisted of one free fruit or vegetable for each pupil every day.

Between 2010 and 2017, the National Institute of Public Health conducted four different child growth studies in which the height and weight of more than 11,000 children and adolescents were measured. The researchers used the data from these studies to look at how the school fruit scheme affected the children's weight when they were eight and 13 years old.

"We find no effect from the school fruit scheme on the pupils' weight, neither positive nor negative. This shows that there was no basis for claiming that the scheme would lead to a reduction in obesity among [young people](#). The EU is still today a major driving force behind such measures, and obesity prevention is one of the main arguments they use," Øvrebø says.

She herself says that she was not particularly surprised by the findings.

"So many factors affect the development of overweight and [obesity](#), so it

is a bit far-fetched to think that one piece of fruit or vegetable during the school day should have much impact. We know that school fruit increases the intake of fruit and vegetables, but it is wrong to claim that it affects pupils' [weight](#) to any degree," Øvrebø says.

Free school [fruit](#) may still lead to a better diet over time, and this can have a positive impact on public health.

"To get an answer to this, you must assess the effect of the national measure on diet and health, also in adulthood," Øvrebø says .

**More information:** Bente Øvrebø et al, A nationwide school fruit and vegetable policy and childhood and adolescent overweight: A quasi-natural experimental study, *PLOS Medicine* (2022). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1003881](#)

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