

Meeting more UK Government dietary guidelines during childhood could improve future cardiometabolic health

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Researchers recently assessed how well school-age children in the study complied to key UK Government dietary recommendations and then

analyzed the relationship between meeting these dietary recommendations during childhood and future cardiometabolic health.

An Eatwell Guide score (C-EWG score) was calculated when the participants were 7, 10 and 13 years old, to assess how well their habitual diet aligned to nine dietary recommendations represented within the [Eatwell Guide](#). Cardiometabolic health was evaluated when these same participants were 17 and 24 years old, by using a cardiometabolic (heart/diabetes) risk score, which took into account the participant's blood levels of certain fats, their blood pressure, insulin resistance and body fat.

Dr. Genevieve Buckland, lead author of the study, from Bristol Medical School, said, "In general, the majority of the children in the study didn't meet the [dietary guidelines](#) for many key foods and nutrients, because their diets contained too much saturated fat, sugar and salt and not enough fruit and vegetables, fiber and fish, particularly oily fish."

The study also found that almost a third of the children in the study only met one out of nine key Eatwell Guide dietary recommendations, while 12-15% didn't meet any of them. Children who met fewer dietary recommendations were more likely to come from a lower-socio-economic position and have mothers who were overweight or obese.

"A key finding was that children with diets which were more in line with UK guidelines had better cardiometabolic health when they were young adults. For example, children who met three or more dietary recommendations at 7 years had a lower cardiometabolic risk score at 24 years compared to those who didn't meet any dietary recommendations. This reduction was largely driven by lower levels of body fat, cholesterol, [blood pressure](#) and [insulin resistance](#)," says Dr. Buckland.

The research adds to the evidence on the [health benefits](#) of following

UK Government [dietary recommendations](#) from childhood and highlights the importance of creating healthy dietary habits from young ages to maintain future cardiovascular health.

Dr. Buckland explains, "The large gap between what [school-age children](#) in this cohort were eating and what they should be eating, according to Government dietary guidelines, implies that a huge amount of work still needs to be done to help UK children adopt healthier eating habits. Public health initiatives and policies particularly need to target children and their parents from lower socio-economic positions, because poorer dietary habits among these groups of children could be contributing to social inequalities in cardiovascular health later in life."

The study led by researchers from University of Bristol, is based on data from the longitudinal [health study](#), [Children of the 90s](#). The findings have been recently published in the *British Journal of Nutrition*.

More information: Genevieve Buckland et al, Prospective association between adherence to UK dietary guidelines in school-age children and cardiometabolic risk markers in adolescence/early adulthood in the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) cohort, *British Journal of Nutrition* (2023). [DOI: 10.1017/S0007114523000685](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007114523000685)

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