

Why don't children belong to the clean plate club?

December 2 2014, by Brian Wansink



Unlike adults, kids are still learning about what foods they like and how much it will take to fill them up. Credit: Daniel Miller

Whereas most adults are members of the Clean Plate Club, they eat an average of about 90% of the food they serve themselves, this is not true for children.

New Cornell research aggregated six different studies of 326 elementary school-aged children. It showed that, if their parents are not around, the average child only eats about 60% of what they serve themselves. More than a third goes right in the trash.

Unlike adults, kids are still learning about what foods they like and how much it will take to fill them up. "It's natural, for them to make some mistakes and take a food they don't like or to serve too much," says lead researcher Brian Wansink, author of Slim by Design: Mindless Eating Solutions for Everyday Life and Director of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab. "What's less natural is for them to be forced to eat their 'mistakes' by their parents."

"Yet to a loving, but frustrated parent who wants his/her non-cooperating children to be vegetable-eating members of the Clean Plate Club, there is good news in these results. They show that children who only eat half to two-thirds of the food they serve themselves aren't being wasteful, belligerent, or disrespectful," said Wansink, "They are just being normal children." This should provide comfort and reduce anxiety for frustrated Clean Plate Club parents.

More information: Wansink, Brian and Katherine A. Johnson (2014). Adults Only: Why Don't Children Belong to the Clean Plate Club? *International Journal of Obesity*, forthcoming.

Provided by Cornell Food & Brand Lab

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