

Joint Irish Section and American Society for Nutrition Meeting, 15–17 June 2011, 70th anniversary: 'Vitamins in early development and healthy ageing: impact on infectious and chronic disease'

Eating attitudes of children may affect over eating and contribute to obesity

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Children may struggle to control their energy intake, particularly when parents are very controlling over what, when and how much they eat. When children are encouraged to 'clean their plates' they often override internal satiety cues and learn to eat by the size of the portion put in front of them⁽¹⁾. The aim of this study was to explore the eating attitudes of year 6 (age 10–11 years) children in relation to prevalence of overweight and obesity. Existing eating behaviour questionnaires for children have tended to focus on eating disorders and emotional eating^(2,3) rather than the motivators for eating habits. The Eating Attitudes questionnaire was developed based on the work of Wansink⁽⁴⁾. This questionnaire investigated children's attitudes to food via factors such as speed of eating, portion size and cues to eating. Ten questions were asked, such as 'I think it is important to eat everything on my plate at meals', and 'I usually think that there's too much food on my plate', and were scored on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was completed by 318 children (boys *n* 151 [47.5%], girls *n* 167 [52.5%]) and 81% of respondents stated that it was either important or very important to eat everything on their plates and 37% thought that there was sometimes or always too much food on their plates.

Frequency table of the responses of boys and girls

	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
'I think it is important to eat everything on my plate at meals'		
Not at all important	4.7	1.8
Not very important	5.4	12.6
Makes no difference	8.7	4.8
A little important	44.3	44.3
Very important	36.9	36.5
'I usually think that there's too much food on my plate'		
There's always not enough	6.0	1.8
There's sometimes not enough	5.4	3.6
There's just the right amount for me	51.7	56.9
There's sometimes too much	32.2	34.7
There's always too much	4.7	3.0

There was no association between each question (Table) or with weight status ($P > 0.05$). Most children thought it was important to clear their plates at meals. Many children claimed that there was sometimes or always too much food on their plates. The allocation of portion size by parents needs to be investigated.

1. Birch LL (1998) Psychological influences on the childhood diet. *J Nutr* **128**, 407–410.
2. Van Strien T & Oosterveld P (2008) The Children's DEBQ for assessment of restrained, emotional and external eating in 7 to 12 year old children. *Int J Eat Disord* **41**, 72–81.
3. Schacht M, Richter-Appelt H, Schulte-Markwort M, *et al.* (2006) Eating pattern inventory for children: A new self-rating questionnaire for preadolescents. *J Clin Psychol* **62**, 1259–1273.
4. Wansink B. (2009) *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think*. London: Hay House.