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Vegetable consumption among schoolchildren in Ireland

Mary Callaghan and the HBSC Ireland Team, Health Promotion Research Centre, NUI Galway

Summary

HBSC Ireland 2010 has found that 20.0% of schoolchildren in Ireland report eating vegetables everyday, more than once (18.7% of boys and 21.5% of girls). This figure represents a slight increase since 2006 (17.9%). There has been a slight increase in the number of children who report consuming vegetables in the younger age groups since 2006; from 18.9% to 20.9% among 10-11 year olds and from 17.7% to 20.7% among 12-14 year olds. Children who consume vegetables everyday, more than once are more likely to live with both parents, find it easy to talk to their parents or best friend and are more likely to like school compared to children who consume vegetables less frequently. They are also less likely to spend four or more evenings with friends. Vegetable consumption in this factsheet refers to children who report consuming vegetables everyday, more than once.

Why this topic?

Eating vegetables can help promote health and reduce the risk of a number of chronic diseases². Increasing children’s consumption of vegetables can be challenging as they often have erratic eating behaviour influenced by their social environment³ and they tend to prefer un nutritio us energy-dense food⁴. Studies continue to show that children and adults in most regions of the world are still not eating the recommended daily quantity of vegetables⁵.

Change 2006-2010

The overall percentage of children who report consuming vegetables everyday, more than once has increased slightly from 2006 (17.9%) to 2010 (20.0%). Reported vegetable consumption is higher among girls (21.5%) than boys (18.7%). The percentage of boys consuming vegetables everyday more than once has increased slightly in the younger age groups to 18.9% in the 10-11 year olds and to 19.7% in the 12-14 year olds, with the exception of 15-17 year old boys which remained stable at 17.3%. The percentage of girls consuming vegetables everyday, more than once has increased slightly to 21.9% for the 12-14 year olds but has remained stable for the other age groups.

Vegetable consumption in context

- Children from higher social classes are more likely to consume vegetables (social class 1-2: 23.3%; social class 3-4: 19.0% and social class 5-6: 17.7%) than other social classes.
- Children who eat vegetables are more likely to live with both parents (77.5% vs. 74.1%) and to like school (77.6% vs. 69.5%) than those who do not.
- Children who eat vegetables are more likely to find it easy to talk to their mother (83.9% vs. 81.4%), father (69.6% vs. 65.9%) and best friend (89.7% vs. 87.9%) than those who do not.
- Children who eat vegetables are more likely to like school (77.6% vs. 69.5%) than those who do not.
- Children who eat vegetables are less likely to spend four or more evenings with friends (34.0% vs. 39.6%) than those who do not.
Vegetable consumption among schoolchildren in Ireland

Fifteen year old schoolchildren in Ireland (boys and girls together) are ranked 11th among 40 countries in Europe and North America, with 16.8% reporting vegetable consumption everyday, more than once. Overall 21.5% of 11 year olds in Ireland (rank 8th) and 20.6% of 13 year olds in Ireland (rank 6th) report consuming vegetables more than once everyday.

Implications

The overall percentage of children in Ireland that report consuming vegetables everyday more than once has increased slightly since 2006, with Ireland continuing to rank highly in comparison to other European and North American countries. There is a need to explore what the wider determinants of vegetable consumption are in order to increase vegetable consumption both inside and outside of the school and particularly at home.

References


This factsheet was prepared by Mary Callaghan, Natasha Clarke, Aoife Gavin, Colette Kelly, Michal Molcho, and Saorise Nic Gabhainn and Larri Walker.