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Fruit 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 20.1% of schoolchildren in Ireland report consuming fruit every day more than once (18.0% of boys and 22.2% of girls). This figure has remained stable since 2006 (19.4%). The percentage of children who consume fruit daily more than once is higher among younger children; 20.7% of boys and 27.0% of girls aged 10-11 years vs. 17.0% of boys and 21.5% of girls aged 15-17 years. Children who consume fruit more than once daily are more likely to live with both parents, find it easy to talk to their parents or best friend and to like school. They are less likely to spend four or more evenings with friends or to report feeling pressured by school. Fruit consumption in this factsheet refers to children who report consuming fruit every day more than once.

Why this topic?
Fruit provides nutrients which are vital for a healthy body. Many children and adolescents do not eat the recommended quantity of fruit. A diet rich in fruit and vegetables has been found to have a positive effect on weight management and disease prevention. Previous research has indicated that adult dietary behaviours are established throughout childhood and adolescence, emphasising the importance of promoting fruit consumption in children.

Change 2006-2010
The overall percentage of children who report consuming fruit more than once daily has remained stable between 2006 (19.4%) and 2010 (20.1%). There has been a slight increase in the number of boys aged 10-11 years who report consuming fruit more than once every day from 18.2% in 2006 to 20.7% in 2010. The prevalence of fruit consumption continues to be higher among girls than boys (22.2% vs. 18.0%).

Fruit consumption in context
- Children from higher social classes are more likely to report consuming fruit more than once daily (social classes 1-2: 23.7%; social classes 3-4: 18.7% and social classes 5-6: 16.0%).
- Children who consume fruit are more likely to live with both parents (77.5% vs. 74.2%) and to like school (78.7% vs. 69.1%) than those who do not.
- Children who consume fruit are more likely to find it easy to talk to their mother (83.8% vs. 81.3%), father (70.8% vs. 65.5%) and best friend (90.9% vs. 87.6%) than those who do not.
- Children who consume fruit are less likely to spend four or more evenings with friends (36.0% vs. 39.3%) and to feel pressured by schoolwork (35.6% vs. 39.4%) than those who do not.
Fruit consumption among schoolchildren in Ireland

International
Fifteen year old schoolchildren in Ireland (boys and girls together) are ranked 14th among 40 countries in Europe and North America, with 17.2% reporting fruit consumption twice or more daily. Overall 23.7% of 11 year olds in Ireland (rank 18th) and 18.4% of 13 year olds in Ireland (rank 20th) report consuming fruit twice or more daily.

Implications
The number of young people that report consuming fruit twice or more daily has remained stable since 2006. Ireland ranks high among 15 year olds and midrange for 11 and 13 year olds in comparison to other European and North American countries. Nevertheless the majority of schoolchildren in Ireland are not eating the recommended daily quantity of fruit. It is important to identify factors which influence fruit consumption during childhood and adolescence and target interventions for increasing fruit consumption at school and at home.

References

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