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The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) is a research study conducted by an international network of research teams<sup>1</sup> in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (Europe) and co-ordinated by Professor Candace Currie of the University of St Andrews. This factsheet is based on data collected in 2010 from 12,661 10-17 year olds in Ireland from randomly selected schools throughout the country.

Further information is available at:  
<http://www.hbsc.org>  
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HEALTH BEHAVIOUR IN  
SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN



# Dieting behaviour among schoolchildren in Ireland

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## Summary

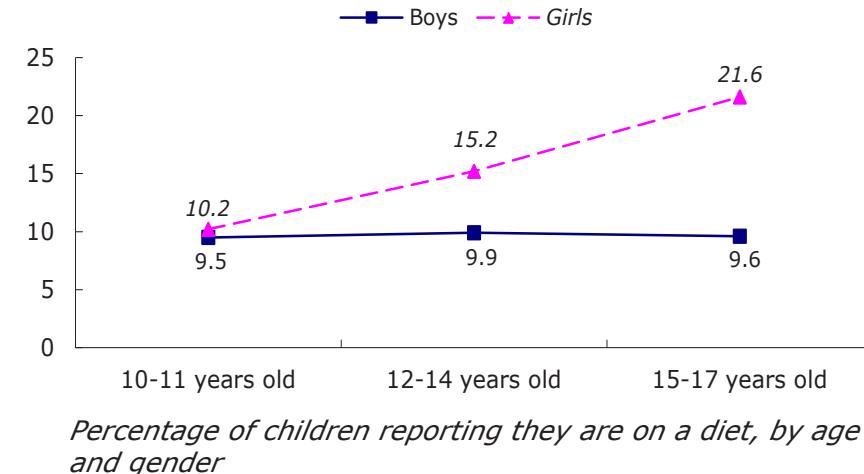
HBSC Ireland 2010 has found that 13.2% of children report that they are currently on a diet (9.7% of boys and 16.9% of girls). This figure has remained stable since 2006. The percentage of children dieting is higher among girls than boys (16.9% of girls vs. 9.7% of boys) and this figure increases with age (9.8% of 10-11 year olds, 12.5% of 12-14 year olds and 15.2% of 15-17 year olds). The percentage of children dieting is highest among girls aged 15-17 years old (21.6%). Children who report dieting are less likely to live with both parents, find it easy to talk to their parents or like school and they are more likely to report feeling pressured by schoolwork. Dieting in this factsheet refers to children who report that they are on a diet or doing something to lose weight at present.

## Why this topic?

Obesity is an important health issue in Ireland with being overweight now the most prevalent childhood disorder<sup>2</sup>. Weight reducing behaviour is common among young people<sup>3</sup> with many engaging in unhealthy methods of weight control<sup>1</sup>. Non-overweight children have also been found to engage in dieting, which may be associated with different risks<sup>3</sup>. Unhealthy eating practices developed in childhood and adolescence may be carried into adulthood with harmful consequences<sup>4</sup>.

## Change 2006-2010

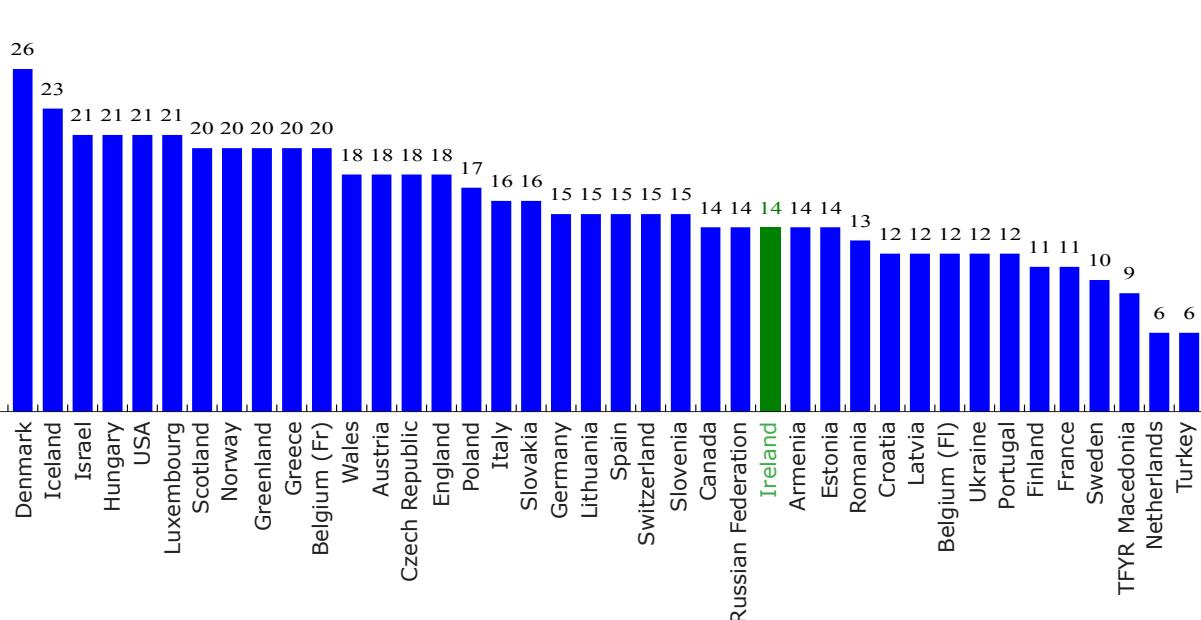
The percentage of children who report that they are on a diet has remained relatively stable from 2006 (11.5%) to 2010 (13.2%). There has been a slight increase among girls from 14.9% in 2006 to 16.9% in 2010, with the figure for boys remaining more stable from 8.3% in 2006 to 9.7% in 2010. There has been a slight increase among girls in the 12-14 year old age group (13% to 15.2%), with the other age groups (boys and girls) remaining stable since 2006.



## Dieting in context

- Children who report that they are on a diet are less likely to live with both parents (71.5% vs. 75.2%) than those who are not.
- Children who report dieting are less likely to find it easy to talk to their mother (75.5% vs. 82.7%) and father (57.2% vs. 68.0%) than those who are not.
- Children who report that they are on a diet are more likely to feel pressured by schoolwork (48.7% vs. 37.2%) and are less likely to report liking school (67.8% vs 71.4%) than those who are not.
- Dieting is not associated with social class, ease of talking to best friend or spending four or more evenings with friends.

## ...Dieting behaviour among schoolchildren in Ireland



Percentage of 15 year old children reporting they are on a diet, by country

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Contact us at: [hbsc@nuigalway.ie](mailto:hbsc@nuigalway.ie)

### International

Fifteen year old schoolchildren in Ireland (boys and girls together) are ranked 26th among 40 countries in Europe and North America with 14% reporting that they are on a diet. Overall children in Ireland are ranked 31st among 11 year olds (10% report being on a diet) and 29th among 13 year olds (12% report being on a diet).

### Implications

The proportion of children in Ireland reporting that they are on a diet has remained stable since 2006 with Ireland featuring in a midrange to low position in comparison to other European and North American countries. Findings presented in this factsheet suggest that good communication with parents and liking school may be protective against engaging in dieting behaviour.

While dieting is prevalent among both genders, figures for girls are higher across all age groups with a substantial difference between younger (10-11 year olds) and older girls (15-17 year olds). With the growing issue of obesity in Ireland, young people should be provided with support for healthy eating and physical activity and informed of the dangers associated with unhealthy weight control practices.

### References

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