

MEDIA RELEASE



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Study shows fruit juice/drink link to children's weight gain

Australian schoolchildren who drink fruit juices and fruit drinks are more likely to be overweight or obese than those who don't, Deakin researchers have found.

In a study* of children aged four to 12 years from the Barwon South Western region researchers Andrea Sanigorski, Colin Bell and Boyd Swinburn from the University's Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences found that children who had drunk more than two glasses (500ml) of fruit juice/drink per day were more likely to be overweight or obese.

"These odds increased as the amounts of fruit juice/drink consumed increased," Dr Sanigorski said.

"Children who drank more than three glasses of soft drink (three quarters of a litre/750ml) or 4 glasses of fruit juice/drinks (1 litre) on the day in question were more than twice as likely to be overweight or obese compared with children who did not drink these drinks."

Dr Sanigorski said the study's findings were consistent with those found in children in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Parents unaware

"Soft drink in this study was not the biggest issue," she said. "The data would appear to show primary school children do not regularly drink a lot of soft drink, however parents may not be aware that regular and large amounts of fruit drinks, fruit juices and fruit cordials can also be bad for children's long term health.

"These drinks contribute high amounts of energy to kids' diets', yet they don't make them feel full."

Dr Sanigorski said the study had also shown that children ate high amounts of snack food. "Although the study did not demonstrate any link to weight gain with these foods, these snacks often contain high amounts of fat, salt and sugar, and their consumption may displace other more nutritious food in the diet," she said.

"These snacks are conveniently designed to fit into lunch boxes and easily carried to school and consumed by children.

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Healthier alternative

"Parents need to consider more healthy alternatives to both sweetened drinks and snack foods, and children's environments, such as preschools and schools, need to be supportive also.

"One such alternative could be as simple as a piece of fruit. Not only is it nutrient rich, but it provides fibre and can keep children fuller for longer."

Dr Sanigorski said the study had underlined the importance of the evening meal in relation to children's intake of vegetables.

"One in five children ate no vegetables at all on the day in question. Previous studies have shown that vegetable consumption occurs outside of school, mainly at home. "We need to try to get vegetables into children's diets throughout the day. Current recommendations for changes to school canteens are great because they try to increase vegetables eaten at school through wraps and the like. Otherwise there is a heavy reliance on the evening meal to provide the recommended number of vegetables in the children's diet."

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About the study

*A representative sample of students (2184) from eight kindergartens and 18 primary schools in the Barwon South Western Region of Victoria participated in the study.

The study provided baseline data for a wider community based intervention project. The aim of the study was to examine the pattern of intake of fast foods, packaged snacks, fruit, vegetables and sweetened drinks by Australian children aged 4 to 12 years and their association with weight status.

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