

Eating for health?

A survey of eating habits among children and young people in Northern Ireland

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The survey

Background

Childhood and adolescence are widely recognised as the times when the foundations of diet-related conditions such as overweight and obesity, raised blood pressure, raised cholesterol and heart disease can be laid down. The eating habits of these age groups have therefore been identified as requiring particular attention, in an effort to promote and protect the health of the young and to invest for better health during their adult years.

An understanding of the dietary and nutritional habits of children and adolescents is essential. Such information can be used to identify particular issues that need to be addressed, and can provide a baseline against which future dietary assessments of these age groups can be measured.

Some information of this kind is available and is suggestive of dietary patterns similar to those demonstrated among adults in Northern Ireland. However most surveys have been conducted among young people in post-primary education. Less is known about the eating patterns of children of primary school age.

Methodology

In autumn 1999, the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland, as part of its work on the Food and Nutrition Strategy, commissioned research to obtain information on eating patterns among 5-75 year olds in Northern Ireland. Adult eating patterns are reported in a separate document.

The dietary behaviour of children and young people aged 5-17 years old was assessed by asking about the frequency of consumption of a range of foods and about breakfast and lunchtime habits. Since it is unlikely that the younger children would be able to produce accurate outlines of their food intake, the best approach to obtaining such information was deemed to be interviewing parents rather than the children themselves. Parents' knowledge of their children's food consumption may decline, however, as the children grow older and become more independent. For example, older children will often decide for themselves what to have for lunch or as snacks during the day, and may not necessarily inform their parents of their food choice. The data relating to the younger children may therefore be more accurate.

Sample

A random probability sample of 2,050 addresses throughout Northern Ireland was drawn from the database of the Valuation and Lands Agency. The addresses were then stratified into three regions – Belfast, east Northern Ireland and west Northern Ireland – and a random sample was drawn from each stratum, excluding people living in institutions. Field workers were instructed to interview all adults aged between 18 and 75 years inclusive at each address.

During these interviews (focusing on the dietary behaviour of adults), the adult with main responsibility for food preparation for any children aged 5-17 years inclusive in the household was identified and subsequently asked a series of questions regarding the eating habits of each child in the household. This yielded a sample of 716 children. The interviews were carried out using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI).

The proportion of children to adults in this survey is consistent with that reported in the annual Family Expenditure Survey. The confidence interval for the sample is 95%. In the following report, statistical significance is pointed out in relation to different variables and cross tabulations. This is based on the Chi-square test, and indicates that $p < 0.05$.

Of the 716 children whose eating habits were recorded by the interviews, 379 (53%) were male and 337 (47%) were female.

The sample was broken down into two age categories, the younger being those between 5 and 11 years of age (52% of the total sample), and the older those between 12 and 17 years of age (48% of the total sample).

	% of total sample	N
Gender:		
Male	53	379
Female	47	337
Age:		
5-11 years	52	375
12-17 years	48	341
Socioeconomic group:		
Professional	7	47
Intermediate	23	166
Junior non-manual	16	116
Skilled manual	20	142
Semi-skilled manual	24	174
Unskilled	5	36
Inadequate information	5	35

Age	% of total sample	N
5	6.7	48
6	6.8	49
7	7.8	56
8	6.1	44
9	10.1	72
10	7.3	52
11	7.5	54
12	8.0	57
13	7.7	55
14	7.4	53
15	7.1	51
16	9.9	71
17	7.5	54
Total	100	716

The households in which the children lived were assigned a socioeconomic group based on the head of household's current or most recent occupation. In most cases this was the father's information, for a substantial proportion however where the father was not a member of the household or his information was incomplete, the mother's information was substituted.

For the purposes of analysis, the socioeconomic classifications were divided into two groups: non-manual, which includes professional, intermediate and junior non-manual occupations; and manual, which comprises skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations.

Socioeconomic group	% of total sample	N
Non-manual	46	329
Manual	49	352
Inadequate information	5	35
Total	100	716

In the tables that follow, all percentages have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.

Results

Parents were asked about each of their children’s breakfast and lunchtime habits. Responses are presented in the eating patterns section. Parents were also asked to state how often their children eat a variety of food items. For ease of reference, these have been presented within the food groups as classified in the nutrition education tool, The Balance of Good Health:

- fruit and vegetables;
- bread, other cereals and potatoes;
- meat, fish and alternatives;
- milk and milk products;
- foods containing fat and foods containing sugar.

Eating patterns

Breakfast habits

Most children eat breakfast on weekdays, with 86% eating breakfast on all five weekdays. However, 6% do not have breakfast at all on weekdays.

Analysis by gender reveals that fewer girls eat breakfast on all five weekdays (80%) compared to boys (91%). There is also some variation between age groups: 79% of older children (12-17 years) eat breakfast every weekday compared to 92% of children in the 5-11 age range. However, these differences were not statistically significant.

Those with the best breakfast habit are 5-11 year old boys, of whom 93% have breakfast on all weekdays. Those with the poorest weekday breakfast habit are 12-17 year old girls, of whom almost a third (30%) do not have breakfast every weekday. More than one in six girls (16%) aged 12-17 years never eats breakfast on weekdays, compared with only 6% of 12-17 year old boys. There is a marked decline in breakfast consumption between younger and older girls: 91% of the 5-11 year old girls eat breakfast every weekday, compared with 70% of those in the 12-17 year old group. Among boys, the decline is much less marked.

Table 1: Number of weekdays on which breakfast is eaten by age group and gender combined

Number of days	Boys			Girls		
	All %	5-11yrs %	12-17yrs %	All %	5-11yrs %	12-17yrs %
0	4	2	6	9	2	16
1	1	2	0	1	1	1
2	1	1	1	5	2	7
3	3	2	4	3	3	4
4	1	1	1	2	0	3
5	91	93	87	80	91	70
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Breakfast consumption also varies between socioeconomic groups, with 90% of those from non-manual households eating breakfast every weekday, compared to 82% of those from manual households ($p=0.01$).

Table 2: Number of weekdays on which breakfast is eaten by socioeconomic group

Number of days	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
0	5	8
1	1	1
2	1	5
3	2	3
4	1	2
5	90	82
BASE	329	352

Breakfast habits at weekends show a similar pattern, with 91% of the sample eating breakfast both days; 4% do not eat breakfast at weekends.

As with weekday breakfast habits, fewer of those aged 12-17 years eat breakfast at weekends (86%) compared to 96% of 5-11 year olds. When age and gender are considered together, marked differences in breakfast habits are apparent, with both girls and boys in the older age groups eating it less often than their younger counterparts (for girls $p=0.003$, for boys $p=0.005$). There is less variation between socioeconomic group than for weekday habits.

Table 3: Number of weekend days on which breakfast is eaten by age group and gender combined

Number of days	Boys			Girls		
	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%	%	%	%
0	3	2	5	5	1	10
1	5	2	8	4	3	3
2	92	96	86	91	95	86
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

The usual place for children from Northern Ireland to eat breakfast is still at home with their families (94%).

Lunchtime habits

Parents were asked where their children usually had lunch. School lunches are the most popular choice, taken by 49% of the sample. Packed lunches are also popular, and are taken by 43% of the sample. Few go home for lunch (3%) or buy lunch outside school (3%).

There is little variation by gender or age. Analysis by socioeconomic group identified some differences. More children from manual households ate school meals (52%), compared to those from non-manual households (45%). Conversely, more of those from non-manual households (48%) take packed lunch compared to those from manual households (39%).

Buying lunch outside school was more common among those from non-manual households, 5% of whom usually buy lunch outside school compared with 1% from manual households, whereas coming home for lunch was more common among children from manual households (5%) than children from non-manual households (1%).

Table 4: Lunchtime habits by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual %	Manual %
Eat a packed lunch	48	39
Eat a school meal	45	52
Come home for lunch	1	5
Buy lunch out of school	5	1
Don't have lunch	1	1
Other	0	1
BASE	329	352

Those parents who said their children took a school meal were asked whether this was a traditional, set school meal or selected from a cash cafeteria system.

More of the older pupils use the cash cafeteria system, which is probably an indication of the wide availability of this system in post-primary schools.

Table 5: Type of school lunch taken by age group and gender combined

	All %	Boys		All %	Girls	
		5-11yrs %	12-17yrs %		5-11yrs %	12-17yrs %
Set school meal	60	90	28	50	82	18
Cafeteria	39	9	72	50	16	81
Other	1	1	0	1	1	1
BASE	187	98	89	164	80	84

Fruit and Vegetables

Fruit

All fruit was taken into account, including fresh, frozen, dried and tinned fruit and fruit juice.

Nearly three quarters (73%) of children were reported to eat fruit 'most days' (three to six days per week) and over half (52%) were reported to eat fruit every day. However, 10% of children were reported to eat fruit less often than once a week or not at all.

Fruit consumption showed gender variation, with girls eating fruit more often than boys.

Table 6: Frequency of fruit consumption by age group and gender combined

	All %	Boys		All %	Girls	
		5-11yrs %	12-17yrs %		5-11yrs %	12-17yrs %
More than once a day	19	19	20	20	21	19
Once a day	31	34	27	36	39	33
Most days	19	22	17	22	25	20
Once/twice a week	18	16	21	14	9	20
Less often/never	13	10	16	7	5	9
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

More than three quarters (78%) of girls eat fruit most days or daily, compared to just over two thirds of boys (69%) ($p=0.05$).

Fruit consumption varied significantly by age, with younger children eating fruit more often than older children. Four fifths (80%) of 5-11 year olds eat fruit on most days or daily compared to two thirds (67%) of 12-17 year olds ($p=0.007$).

Combining these results shows that girls aged 5-11 years are the most frequent consumers of fruit, with 85% eating it daily or on most days. Older boys aged 12-17 years old eat fruit least frequently, with 63% eating it daily or on most days (for females $p=0.03$, for males the difference was not significant).

Analysis by socioeconomic group indicated significant differences in the consumption of fruit. More than one in four (28%) children from non-manual households eat fruit more than once a day compared with 12% of those from manual households ($p=0.02$).

Table 7: Frequency of fruit consumption by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual %	Manual %
More than once a day	28	12
Once a day	31	35
Most days	21	21
Once/twice a week	11	21
Less often/never	9	12
BASE	329	352

Those parents who stated that their children ate fruit most days or more often were asked how many portions of fruit their child would normally have on a daily basis. Most (80%) eat one or two portions. There is little variation by gender or age group.

Table 8: Number of portions of fruit eaten each day by gender

	All %	Boys %	Girls %
1 portion	44	41	46
2 portions	36	38	35
3 portions	13	12	13
4 portions	4	7	2
5+ portions	2	1	3
BASE	524	261	263

Fruit consumption shows significant variation between the different socioeconomic groups. One in four (25%) of those from non-manual households who eat fruit daily eat three or more portions of fruit per day, compared to 14% of those from manual households ($p=0.01$).

Table 9: Number of portions of fruit eaten each day by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual %	Manual %
1 portion	37	51
2 portions	39	34
3 portions	17	9
4 portions	5	3
5+ portions	3	2
BASE	329	352

Vegetables

Parents were asked how often their children eat salad or vegetables. Vegetables include all fresh, frozen, dried, or tinned varieties but do not include potatoes, which are classified as a carbohydrate-rich/starchy food along with bread, rice, pasta and cereals, and are presented in the section **Bread, other cereals and potatoes**.

More than half (61%) of the sample eat vegetables most days; only 40% have vegetables every day.

Vegetable consumption shows a similar gender variation to that observed for fruit. Girls eat vegetables more frequently than boys, with two thirds (67%) of girls eating vegetables daily, or on most days, compared to just over half (56%) of boys ($p=0.02$).

The frequency of eating vegetables varies little between age groups: 60% of all 5-11 year olds and 62% of 12-17 year olds eat vegetables daily or on most days.

However when gender and age variations are considered together, the most frequent consumers of vegetables are 12-17 year old girls (67% eat vegetables daily or on most days) and boys aged 5-11 years are the least frequent consumers (53% eat them daily or on most days). This difference was not found to be significant.

Table 10: Frequency of vegetable consumption by age group and gender combined

	Boys			Girls		
	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than once a day	5	6	3	7	8	6
Once a day	33	30	36	36	33	39
Most days	18	17	19	24	26	22
Once/twice a week	24	21	28	18	14	22
Less often/never	21	26	15	15	18	11
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Vegetable consumption shows highly significant variation between the different socioeconomic groups. Almost half (46%) of those from non-manual households eat vegetables at least once a day compared with 35% of those from manual households ($p=0.004$).

Table 11: Frequency of vegetable consumption by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
More than once a day	8	4
Once a day	38	31
Most days	22	19
Once/twice a week	18	23
Less often/never	14	22
BASE	329	352

Number of portions of vegetables

Those parents who said their children eat vegetables most days or daily (ie 61% of the sample) were asked how many portions of vegetables their child would normally have on a daily basis. Most (91%) eat one or two portions. There is no variation by gender and little variation by age group: 89% of 5-11 year olds have one to two portions compared to 93% of 12-17 year olds. This difference was not found to be significant.

Analysis by socioeconomic group revealed little variation.

Total portions of fruit and vegetables

Current research highlights the importance of eating more fruit and vegetables, as this is associated with protection against chronic diseases, such as coronary heart disease and some cancers. A total of five or more portions of fruit and vegetables daily is recommended.

The total number of portions of fruit and vegetables was calculated for all those children who were reported to eat them most days or daily. For the purposes of this analysis, children who were reported to eat fruit and vegetables once or twice a week or less often were assumed to eat an average of zero portions per day.

Overall only 11% of children in the sample are eating the recommended number of portions of fruit and vegetables per day.

One in five boys (20%) and one in eight girls (12%) do not eat any fruit or vegetables on a daily basis according to their parents.

Table 12: Total number of portions of fruit and vegetables eaten each day by gender

	All %	Boys %	Girls %
0 portions	17	20	12
1 portion	17	17	17
2 portions	25	26	24
3 portions	16	14	18
4 portions	15	11	19
5+ portions	11	11	10
BASE	716	379	337

There is little variation between different age groups. Of the 5-11 year olds, 15% eat no fruit or vegetables daily compared to 18% of 12-17 year olds. Slightly more children in the 5-11 year old group achieve the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables daily (12%), compared to 9% of 12-17 year olds. However these differences were not found to be significant.

Table 13: Total number of portions of fruit and vegetables eaten each day by age group

	All %	5-11yrs %	12-17yrs %
0 portions	17	15	18
1 portion	17	17	17
2 portions	25	24	27
3 portions	16	17	14
4 portions	15	15	15
5+ portions	11	12	9
BASE	716	375	341

When age and gender are considered together, the group most likely to eat no fruit or vegetables on a daily basis is 12-17 year old boys. The group achieving the greatest number of fruit and vegetable portions per day is 5-11 year old boys.

Table 14: Total number of portions of fruit and vegetables eaten each day by age group and gender combined

	Boys			Girls		
	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%	%	%	%
0 portions	20	18	22	12	10	15
1 portions	17	18	17	17	17	17
2 portions	26	25	28	24	23	25
3 portions	14	15	12	18	20	17
4 portions	11	11	12	19	20	18
5+ portions	11	13	9	10	11	9
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Analysis by socioeconomic group showed significant variations ($p=0.05$). Children from non-manual households were more likely to achieve the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables each day (14%) compared with those from manual households (8%). Conversely, children from manual households were almost twice as likely to eat less than one portion of fruit and vegetables daily (21%) compared with those from non-manual households (11%).

Table 15: Total number of portions of fruit and vegetables eaten each day by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
0 portions	11	21
1 portion	16	19
2 portions	22	28
3 portions	18	13
4 portions	19	12
5+ portions	14	8
BASE	329	352

Bread, other cereals and potatoes

Bread

Parents were asked how often their child eats bread. Over half (52%) of children whose parents were surveyed eat bread more than once a day. A further 36% eat bread once a day. There is little variation by gender or age group.

Table 16: Frequency of consumption of bread by age group and gender combined

	Boys			Girls		
	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than once a day	55	54	55	48	49	47
Once every day	33	33	34	40	41	38
Most days	7	7	6	7	5	9
Once/twice a week	4	4	4	4	4	5
Less often/never	1	2	1	1	1	1
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Consumption of bread varies significantly between the socioeconomic groups: 47% of children from non-manual households eat bread more than once a day compared to 56% of those from manual households ($p=0.03$).

Table 17: Frequency of consumption of bread by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
More than once a day	47	56
Once a day	42	30
Most days	7	8
Once/twice a week	4	4
Less often/never	1	2
BASE	329	352

Breakfast cereal

Breakfast cereal is eaten on a daily basis by 71% of the sample. A further 11% eat it most days. Analysis by gender shows some variation, with more boys eating breakfast cereal at least once a day (79%) compared with girls (62%). In addition, more girls than boys eat breakfast cereal less frequently than once a week or never (14% compared with 6%). These results closely correspond to those for frequency of breakfast consumption; for example fewer girls eat breakfast on all five weekdays (80%) compared to boys (91%).

Table 18: Frequency of consumption of breakfast cereal by gender

	All	Boys	Girls
	%	%	%
More than once a day	10	14	6
Once every day	61	65	56
Most days	11	10	13
Once/twice a week	8	6	10
Less often/never	10	6	14
BASE	716	379	337

Analysis by age reveals that older children eat breakfast cereal less frequently than those in the 5-11 year old age group. The group least likely to eat cereal every day is 12-17 year old girls, of whom only 43% have cereal every day compared to 80% for younger girls.

Older boys also eat breakfast cereal less frequently than their younger counterparts but the difference is less marked (72% have it every day compared with 85% of the younger age group).

Table 19: Frequency of consumption of breakfast cereal by age group and gender combined

	All	Boys		All	Girls	
		5-11yrs	12-17yrs		5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than once a day	14	17	10	6	5	7
Once every day	65	68	62	56	75	36
Most days	10	9	10	13	9	17
Once/twice a week	6	4	8	10	4	17
Less often/never	6	2	10	14	6	23
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Consumption of breakfast cereal varies slightly between the socioeconomic groups: 74% of children from non-manual households eat breakfast cereal at least once a day compared to 68% of those from manual households. This difference is not statistically significant.

Table 20: Frequency of consumption of breakfast cereal by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
More than once a day	11	9
Once every day	63	59
Most days	9	13
Once/twice a week	8	8
Less often/never	9	12
BASE	329	352

Potatoes

Parents were asked how frequently their children eat potatoes. This includes potatoes of all kinds, except chips, which are considered separately. Of those surveyed, 39% eat potatoes every day. A further 40% eat potatoes on most days. There is little variation by gender or age.

However when gender and age are considered together, some differences are apparent. The group that eats potatoes most frequently is 12-17 year old boys, of whom 46% eat potatoes daily.

Some variation is also apparent between girls, with more older girls eating potatoes only once or twice a week (21%) compared with their younger counterparts (12%). Older girls eat potatoes less often than any other group.

Table 21: Frequency of consumption of potatoes by age group and gender combined

	Boys			Girls		
	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than once a day	5	5	5	3	2	4
Once every day	36	33	41	34	39	29
Most days	39	41	36	41	42	40
Once/twice a week	16	18	14	16	12	21
Less often/never	4	3	5	6	5	7
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Analysis by socioeconomic group showed slight variation, with children from the non-manual group eating potatoes more frequently than those from the manual group: 81% of children from non-manual households eat them most days or more often, compared with 75% of children from manual households ($p=0.04$).

Table 22: Frequency of consumption of potatoes by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
More than once a day	3	5
Once every day	33	36
Most days	45	34
Once/twice a week	14	19
Less often/never	5	6
BASE	329	352

Note: Chips, although made from potatoes, are presented in the section **Foods containing fat and foods containing sugar** because of the fat they absorb during cooking.

Rice and pasta

Rice and pasta are less popular than potatoes. Only 17% of children in the sample have rice or pasta on most days or daily. Almost a third (30%) have rice or pasta less often than once a week or not at all. Girls appear to have rice or pasta more often than boys, with only 26% of girls eating it less than once a week or never, compared to 33% of boys. However, these differences did not reach statistical significance.

Table 23: Frequency of consumption of rice or pasta by gender

	All %	Boys %	Girls %
More than once a day	0	0	0
Once every day	2	2	2
Most days	15	14	17
Once/twice a week	53	50	55
Less often/never	30	33	26
BASE	716	379	337

There is little variation between age groups. However, when age and gender are considered together the most frequent consumers are 12-17 year old girls with 22% eating rice or pasta most days or more often, compared with 13% of older boys. Boys aged 5-11 years were the least frequent consumers of pasta or rice.

Table 24: Frequency of consumption of rice or pasta by age group and gender combined

	All %	Boys		All %	Girls	
		5-11yrs %	12-17yrs %		5-11yrs %	12-17yrs %
More than once a day	0	0	0	0	0	0
Once every day	2	2	1	2	1	2
Most days	14	16	12	17	14	20
Once/twice a week	50	46	56	55	55	55
Less often/never	33	35	31	26	28	23
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Consumption of rice and pasta varied significantly between socioeconomic groups. Children from the non-manual group were more frequent consumers: 78% eat rice or pasta at least once a week, compared with 63% of those from the manual group (p=0.001).

Table 25: Frequency of consumption of rice or pasta by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual %	Manual %
More than once a day	0	0
Once every day	1	2
Most days	20	12
Once/twice a week	57	49
Less often/never	22	37
BASE	329	352

Meat, fish and alternatives

Red meat

Parents were asked how often their children eat red meat, ie beef, lamb or pork. A quarter (25%) of all children in the survey eat red meat most days or daily. Boys eat red meat more frequently than girls do: 26% of boys and 22% of girls were reported to eat it most days or more often. A more marked difference is observed among those reported to eat red meat less than once a week or not at all: 22% of girls compared with 14% of boys. However, this difference was not found to be statistically significant.

Table 26: Frequency of consumption of red meat by gender

	All	Boys	Girls
	%	%	%
More than once a day	1	1	0
Once every day	4	4	4
Most days	20	21	18
Once/twice a week	59	61	56
Less often/never	17	14	22
BASE	716	379	337

Consumption of red meat shows some variation with age. Older boys eat red meat more often than younger boys do: 32% of 12-17 year old boys eat red meat most days or more often, compared with 21% of 5-11 year old boys ($p=0.01$). In contrast, 18% of 5-11 year old boys eat red meat less than once a week or never compared to 9% of older boys.

With girls the opposite pattern is observed, with older girls eating red meat less often than younger girls. For example, 24% of 12-17 year old girls eat red meat less than once a week or never compared to 19% of 5-11 year old girls.

Therefore, older boys are the most frequent consumers of red meat, and older girls are the least frequent consumers.

Table 27: Frequency of consumption of red meat by age group and gender combined

	All	Boys		All	Girls	
		5-11yrs	12-17yrs		5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than once a day	1	1	1	0	0	0
Once every day	4	2	6	4	3	4
Most days	21	18	25	18	21	16
Once/twice a week	61	63	59	56	56	56
Less often/never	14	18	9	22	19	24
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Consumption of red meat shows little variation by socioeconomic group.

Table 28: Frequency of consumption of red meat by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
More than once a day	1	0
Once every day	4	4
Most days	19	21
Once/twice a week	58	58
Less often/never	18	18
BASE	329	352

White meat

Parents were asked how often their children ate white meat, such as chicken and turkey. Results indicate that children are more likely to eat white meat than red meat but eat it less frequently. Just over a quarter (28%) eat white meat most days but the majority (66%) eat it once or twice a week.

Table 29: Frequency of consumption of white meat by gender

	All	Boys	Girls
	%	%	%
More than once a day	0	0	0
Once every day	2	2	1
Most days	26	26	26
Once/twice a week	66	66	67
Less often/never	6	6	6
BASE	716	379	337

Consumption of white meat does not vary between boys and girls, but there is slight variation between age groups. Younger children eat it less frequently than older children, with 7% of younger children eating it less than once a week or never compared to 4% of older children ($p=0.02$).

Table 30: Frequency of consumption of white meat by age group

	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%
More than once a day	0	0	0
Once every day	2	1	3
Most days	26	26	26
Once/twice a week	66	65	67
Less often/never	6	7	4
BASE	716	375	341

Consumption of white meat shows some variation between the socioeconomic groups, with almost a third (31%) of children from non-manual households reported to eat white meat most days or more frequently, compared to 24% of those from manual households. However these differences were not found to be statistically significant.

Table 31: Frequency of consumption of white meat by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
More than once a day	0	0
Once every day	1	2
Most days	30	22
Once/twice a week	63	69
Less often/never	6	6
BASE	329	352

Fish

Parents were asked about their children's consumption of both fried fish (including battered and breadcrumbed fish) and non-fried fish (which included grilled, baked, steamed, tinned or raw fish). Around 41% of children have fried, battered or breadcrumbed fish once or twice a week. A greater proportion of children (57%) has it less often than this. Fewer children eat tinned or non-fried fish. More than two thirds of children (68%) eat it less than once a week or never.

There is little variation by age or socioeconomic group for the consumption of fish of any kind. Consumption of non-fried and tinned fish did not vary with gender, however more boys eat fried, battered or breadcrumbed fish regularly than girls (47% compared to 37%). This difference was not found to be statistically significant.

Table 32: Frequency of consumption of fried, battered or breadcrumbed fish by gender

	All	Boys	Girls
	%	%	%
More than once a day	0	0	0
Once every day	1	1	0
Most days	1	1	1
Once/twice a week	41	45	36
Less often/never	57	52	62
BASE	716	379	337

Meat products

Meat products include those such as meat pies, sausage rolls, and sausages. Around 18% of all children eat meat products on most days or daily. Girls are significantly less likely to eat meat products regularly, for example 30% of them eat these types of foods less than once a week or never, compared to 19% of boys ($p=0.01$).

Table 33: Frequency of consumption of meat products by gender

	All	Boys	Girls
	%	%	%
More than once a day	1	1	0
Once every day	4	5	3
Most days	13	14	13
Once/twice a week	57	60	54
Less often/never	24	19	30
BASE	716	379	337

Consumption of these products shows little variation between the age groups. However, when age and gender are considered together, 12-17 year old boys are identified as the most frequent consumers of these products (22% eat them most days or more often). These products are eaten least frequently by 12-17 year old girls, 38% of whom eat them less than once a week or never.

Table 34: Frequency of consumption of meat products by age group and gender combined

	Boys			Girls		
	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than once a day	1	1	1	0	0	0
Once every day	5	4	6	3	2	3
Most days	14	13	15	13	13	13
Once/twice a week	60	62	58	54	62	47
Less often/never	19	19	20	30	23	38
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Consumption of meat products varies significantly between the socioeconomic groups. The most frequent consumers of these products are children from manual households, of whom 20% eat these products most days or more frequently. In contrast, more children from non-manual households eat meat products less often than once a week or never (30% compared with 20% of those from manual households) ($p=0.03$).

Table 35: Frequency of consumption of meat products by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
More than once a day	1	0
Once every day	3	4
Most days	11	16
Once/twice a week	55	60
Less often/never	30	20
BASE	329	352

Milk and milk products

Milk

Parents were asked what type of milk each of their children would normally use. Almost half of the sample has semi-skimmed milk. There is no variation by gender. However, analysis by age reveals that more 12-17 year olds use semi-skimmed milk (55%), compared with 42% of 5-11 year olds ($p=0.003$).

When age and gender are combined, there is a marked variation for girls, with older girls five times more likely not to use any milk ($p=0.01$).

Table 36: Type of milk consumed by age group and gender combined

	Boys			Girls		
	All %	5-11yrs %	12-17yrs %	All %	5-11yrs %	12-17yrs %
Whole milk	44	48	39	45	54	35
Semi-skimmed milk	50	45	56	46	39	54
Skimmed milk	1	1	2	2	1	2
From farm	2	3	1	3	2	3
No usual type	1	2	1	1	1	1
None	1	2	1	3	1	5
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Analysis by socioeconomic group showed variation. More children (52%) from manual households use whole milk (including milk from farms) compared with those from non-manual households (41%).

In contrast, more children from non-manual households used semi-skimmed milk (54% compared with 44% of those from manual households). Skimmed milk was not widely used by any group. On average 2% of the sample did not use any milk. Only those in the non-manual group used other milks, for example soya or goat's milk.

Table 37: Type of milk consumed by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual %	Manual %
Whole milk	39	49
Semi-skimmed milk	54	44
Skimmed milk	2	1
From farm	2	3
No usual type	1	1
Other milk	<1	0
None	2	3
BASE	329	352

The survey did not cover milk products such as cheese and yogurt.

Foods containing fat and foods containing sugar

Chips

Overall, 18% of children eat chips most days or more often. A further 66% eat them once or twice a week.

Consumption of chips does not vary with gender. However, older children eat chips more frequently than younger age groups: 24% of 12-17 year olds eat them most days or more often compared with 13% of 5-11 year olds.

Table 38: Frequency of consumption of chips by age group

	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%
More than once a day	1	1	1
Once every day	3	2	4
Most days	14	10	19
Once/twice a week	66	72	60
Less often/never	16	15	16
BASE	716	375	341

When age and gender variables are considered together, marked variations are observed. Of the girls, 25% of the older age group eat chips most days or more often, compared with 12% of the younger group (p=0.05). A similar pattern is observed for boys.

Table 39: Frequency of consumption of chips by age group and gender combined

	Boys			Girls		
	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than once a day	1	1	1	0	0	1
Once every day	3	2	4	4	2	5
Most days	14	10	19	14	10	19
Once/twice a week	68	73	63	64	71	56
Less often/never	14	13	14	18	17	19
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Analysis by socioeconomic group shows slight variation. The most frequent consumers of chips are children from manual households, with 22% of them eating chips most days or more often, compared with 15% of those from non-manual households. The difference is not statistically significant.

Table 40: Frequency of consumption of chips by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
More than once a day	0	1
Once every day	2	5
Most days	13	16
Once/twice a week	69	64
Less often/never	16	15
BASE	329	352

Other fried foods

The majority of children (96%) eat other fried foods, such as bacon, eggs, or sausages once or twice a week or less. There is little variation between boys and girls or between age groups. When age and gender are considered together, some variation is observed among the boys. It appears that older boys eat other fried food more frequently than the younger age group, with 50% of 12-17 year old boys eating them once or twice a week, compared with 40% of the 5-11 year old age group.

Table 41: Frequency of consumption of other fried foods by age group and gender combined

	Boys			Girls		
	All %	5-11yrs %	12-17yrs %	All %	5-11yrs %	12-17yrs %
More than once a day	0	0	0	0	0	0
Once every day	1	1	2	1	0	2
Most days	3	3	4	2	1	2
Once/twice a week	45	40	50	37	37	37
Less often/never	50	56	44	60	61	58
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Analysis by socioeconomic group revealed little variation: 6% of children from manual households have fried foods most days or daily compared to 2% of children from non-manual households. Sixty percent of those from non-manual households eat fried foods less often than once a week or never, compared to 50% of those from manual households (p=0.04).

Table 42: Frequency of consumption of other fried foods by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual %	Manual %
Once every day	1	2
Most days	1	4
Once/twice a week	38	44
Less often/never	60	50
BASE	329	352

Note: Fried fish is presented in the section **Meat, fish and alternatives**, to allow comparison with non-fried fish.

Biscuits

Nearly three quarters (73%) of children were reported to eat biscuits every day, with a third (33%) eating them more than once a day (biscuits includes wrapped varieties such as Twix, Kit Kat and Snack). There is little variation between boys and girls although a higher proportion of boys eats biscuits more than once a day.

Table 43: Frequency of consumption of biscuits by gender

	All %	Boys %	Girls %
More than once a day	33	38	28
Once every day	40	37	43
Most days	14	14	15
Once/twice a week	8	7	9
Less often/never	4	4	5
BASE	716	379	337

Biscuit consumption showed little variation by age group for boys. However, older girls eat biscuits less frequently than younger girls: more than three quarters (78%) of girls in the 5-11 year old group eat biscuits every day compared to 63% of girls in the 12-17 year old group. These differences were not found to be statistically significant.

Table 44: Frequency of consumption of biscuits by age group and gender combined

	Boys			Girls		
	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than once a day	38	38	37	28	31	24
Once every day	37	36	38	43	47	39
Most days	14	16	12	15	11	20
Once/twice a week	7	7	8	9	8	10
Less often/never	4	3	5	5	2	8
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Analysis by socioeconomic group shows that a slightly higher proportion of children from manual households (36%) eat biscuits more than once a day compared with those from the non-manual households (30%).

Table 45: Frequency of consumption of biscuits by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
More than once a day	30	36
Once every day	43	39
Most days	14	15
Once/twice a week	9	7
Less often/never	5	3
BASE	329	352

Confectionery

Almost half (47%) of all children in the sample were reported to have confectionery at least once a day (confectionery includes chocolate bars such as Mars, Drifter and Lion Bar, and is additional to biscuits and wrapped chocolate biscuits).

Consumption of confectionery varies little between boys and girls. However, there is some variation between age groups, with a greater proportion of older children eating confectionery more than once a day.

Overall, 12-17 year old boys are the most frequent consumers of confectionery, with 52% of them eating confectionery daily, compared with 41% of 5-11 year old boys ($p=0.02$). A higher proportion of older boys was reported to eat confectionery more than once a day (19%) compared to 5-11 year old boys (12%).

Table 46: Frequency of consumption of confectionery by age group and gender combined

	Boys			Girls		
	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than once a day	15	12	19	13	10	16
Once every day	31	29	33	36	39	34
Most days	22	23	21	21	21	22
Once/twice a week	26	31	21	23	27	19
Less often/never	5	5	5	6	4	8
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Confectionery consumption showed significant variation ($p=0.05$) between socioeconomic groups. The most frequent consumers are those from the manual households, where 16% of children eat confectionery more than once a day compared to 11% of those from non-manual households.

Table 47: Frequency of consumption of confectionery by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
More than once a day	11	16
Once every day	33	35
Most days	24	20
Once/twice a week	26	23
Less often/never	6	5
BASE	329	352

Cakes and buns

Cakes and buns are eaten less frequently than either confectionery or biscuits, with 14% of all children eating them every day. There is little variation by gender. Older boys eat these products more frequently than any other group: 20% eat them at least once a day, compared with 11% of younger boys, 12% of younger girls and 15% of older girls. However, these differences were not found to be statistically significant.

Table 48: Frequency of consumption of cakes or buns by age group and gender combined

	Boys			Girls		
	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than once a day	3	2	3	2	1	2
Once every day	13	9	17	12	11	13
Most days	12	14	9	14	11	17
Once/twice a week	41	39	43	39	49	29
Less often/never	31	34	28	33	27	39
Don't know	1	2	1	0	1	0
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Variation was observed between socioeconomic groups, with those from non-manual households eating cakes or buns more frequently: 31% of this group eat them most days or more often, compared with 24% of children from manual households. This difference was not found to be statistically significant.

Table 49: Frequency of consumption of cakes or buns by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
More than once a day	1	3
Once every day	15	10
Most days	15	11
Once/twice a week	39	41
Less often/never	30	35
BASE	329	352

Fizzy drinks and squashes

According to their parents, 38% of children drink fizzy drinks or squashes containing sugar every day. Of these, 12% drink them more than once a day.

Consumption of sugary drinks showed some variation by gender, with boys drinking them more often than girls: 15% of boys have sugary drinks more than once a day, compared to 8% of girls ($p=0.03$).

Table 50: Frequency of consumption of sugary fizzy drinks or squashes by gender

	All	Boys	Girls
	%	%	%
More than once a day	12	15	8
Once every day	26	26	26
Most days	15	16	15
Once/twice a week	13	11	15
Less often/never	33	30	37
BASE	716	375	341

There is some variation between the age groups, with more of those aged 12-17 years drinking sugary drinks on a daily basis (40%) compared with the younger age groups (35%).

Table 51: Frequency of consumption of sugary fizzy drinks or squashes by age group

	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%
More than once a day	12	13	10
Once every day	26	22	30
Most days	15	14	16
Once/twice a week	13	12	14
Less often/never	33	36	29
BASE	716	375	341

Younger boys are the most frequent consumers of sugary drinks, with 17% reported to drink them more than once a day. Older girls are the least frequent consumers of sugary drinks, with less than 7% taking them more than once a day ($p=0.04$).

Table 52: Frequency of consumption of sugary fizzy drinks or squashes by age group and gender combined

	Boys			Girls		
	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than once a day	15	17	14	8	10	7
Once every day	26	19	35	26	27	25
Most days	16	18	14	15	10	19
Once/twice a week	11	12	11	15	13	17
Less often/never	30	33	26	37	40	33
Don't know	1	2	0	0	1	0
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Consumption of sugary drinks also varies between the socioeconomic groups, with the most frequent consumption reported among the manual group: 45% of children from this group have sugary drinks at least once a day, compared with 32% of those from non-manual households ($p=0.001$).

Table 53: Frequency of consumption of sugary fizzy drinks or squashes by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
More than once a day	11	13
Once every day	21	32
Most days	11	19
Once/twice a week	15	9
Less often/never	42	26
BASE	329	352

Sugar-free drinks

Note: Sugar-free drinks are sweetened with a variety of artificial sweetening agents as alternatives to sugar. Although they are sugar-free, they are presented here with sugar-containing drinks to allow comparison.

According to their parents, fewer children (26%) drink sugar-free drinks than the sugar-containing varieties on a daily basis, with 9% drinking them more than once a day.

As might be expected, girls tend to drink sugar-free drinks more often than boys: 38% of girls drink these most days or more often, compared with 32% of boys. More boys than girls drink them less than once a week or never (55% of boys compared to 48% of girls) ($p=0.01$).

Table 54: Frequency of consumption of sugar-free fizzy drinks or squashes by gender

	All	Boys	Girls
	%	%	%
More than once a day	9	8	9
Once a day	17	18	16
Most days	9	6	13
Once/twice a week	12	11	14
Less often/never	52	55	48
Don't know	1	2	1
BASE	716	379	337

Younger children tend to drink these drinks more often than the older age group: 12% of 5-11 year olds drink sugar-free drinks more than once a day compared to 5% of 12-17 year olds ($p=0.002$).

Table 55: Frequency of consumption of sugar-free fizzy drinks or squashes by age group

	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%
More than once a day	9	12	5
Once every day	17	18	16
Most days	10	7	13
Once/twice a week	12	12	13
Less often/never	52	51	54
BASE	716	375	341

Those drinking sugar-free drinks most often are 5-11 year old girls (13% drink them more than once a day compared to 5% of 12-17 year old girls).

Table 56: Frequency of consumption of sugar-free fizzy drinks or squashes by age group and gender combined

	Boys			Girls		
	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than once a day	8	11	5	9	13	5
Once every day	18	20	15	16	16	16
Most days	6	5	7	13	8	18
Once/twice a week	11	11	11	14	14	14
Less often/never	56	52	60	48	49	46
Don't know	2	2	2	1	1	1
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Analysis by socioeconomic group revealed little variation.

Table 57: Frequency of consumption of sugar-free fizzy drinks or squashes by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
More than once a day	6	11
Once every day	22	14
Most days	8	11
Once/twice a week	13	11
Less often/never	50	53
BASE	329	352

Savoury snacks

Over half (52%) of all children in the sample eat savoury snacks, such as crisps, at least once a day. Consumption of these products shows little variation between boys and girls or between age groups. However, when age and gender are considered together, more older girls (10%) eat savoury snacks more than once a day than younger girls do (4%), although this variation was not found to be statistically significant.

Table 58: Frequency of consumption of savoury snacks by age group and gender combined

	Boys			Girls		
	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs	All	5-11yrs	12-17yrs
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than once a day	9	9	9	7	4	10
Once every day	42	42	42	47	52	42
Most days	24	26	20	19	21	17
Once/twice a week	17	15	19	21	20	23
Less often/never	7	7	8	5	2	7
BASE	379	206	173	337	169	168

Analysis by socioeconomic group reveals significant differences in the consumption of savoury snacks. The most marked difference is among those who eat these products more than once a day: 12% of children from manual households eat savoury snacks more than once a day compared with 5% of those from non-manual households ($p=0.003$).

Table 59: Frequency of consumption of savoury snacks by socioeconomic group

	Non-manual	Manual
	%	%
More than once a day	5	12
Once every day	44	45
Most days	23	21
Once/twice a week	22	17
Less often/never	7	5
Don't know	0	2
BASE	329	352

Discussion

Nutrition during childhood and adolescence has lifelong consequences. Poor nutrition during these years is associated with compromised oral health and an increased risk of obesity, hypertension, diabetes and coronary heart disease.¹

The findings of this survey highlight a number of concerns relating to the dietary habits of children and young people.

Current nutritional recommendations focus on the overall balance of the diet and emphasise the importance of eating a wide variety of foods from the four main food groups: bread, other cereals and potatoes; fruit and vegetables; meat, fish and alternatives; milk and milk products. One of the key messages is the central role of fruit and vegetables in protecting and promoting health. Research indicates that higher intakes of fruit and vegetables are associated with a lower risk of cancer and coronary heart disease.^{2,3} This protection is observed at intakes of 400g daily or higher.⁴ These findings have been translated into a public health message to eat five or more portions of fruit and vegetables a day (a portion being roughly equivalent to 80g). In the present survey, fruit and vegetable consumption is low across all age, gender and socioeconomic groups. Only 11% of the sample is reported to achieve the recommended target of five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

In contrast, snack products that are high in fat and/or sugar, including biscuits, confectionery, cakes, buns and crisps were eaten frequently by all groups. For example, 73% eat biscuits at least once a day, 47% have confectionery at least once a day and 52% have savoury snacks such as crisps at least once a day.

Fizzy drinks and squashes – both the sugary versions and sugar-free drinks – are consumed frequently by the children and young people in the survey; 38% are reported to have sugary drinks and 26% have sugar-free drinks every day. The frequent consumption of such drinks has important consequences for oral health; taken frequently, sugary drinks can cause tooth decay and sugar-free fizzy drinks have been implicated in dental erosion.

The survey findings also demonstrated marked differences in the consumption of a range of foods between various age, gender and socioeconomic groups. Of particular note are the reported food intakes of girls aged 12-17 years and children and young people from manual households.

Overall many of the dietary intakes reported for older girls were less favourable than for other age and gender groupings. For example, almost a third (30%) of 12-17 year old girls do not have breakfast every weekday, with 16% of the sample reported to never eat breakfast on weekdays. A similar level of breakfast skipping was reported in an earlier survey of 11-16 year olds, in which almost one in six girls never or very rarely ate breakfast.⁵

Breakfast makes an important contribution to overall nutrition. Research indicates that those who do not take breakfast are at risk of missing out on essential vitamins and minerals. Skipping breakfast is believed to compromise children's nutritional status, health, intellectual and physical performance.⁶⁻⁸ Avoiding breakfast also means that hunger is likely to strike during mid-morning when high sugar and/or high fat snacks may be the only source of nourishment on offer.

The frequency of milk consumption was not assessed by this survey. However, consumption of breakfast cereal has been positively related to calcium intakes in girls.⁹ An adequate intake of calcium is essential during childhood and adolescence, to maximise bone development and prevent osteoporosis.¹⁰ As with breakfast consumption, 12-17 year old girls in the present survey eat breakfast cereal less frequently than any other age or gender grouping. It is proposed that the avoidance of breakfast and the low uptake of breakfast cereal with associated milk, suggests that calcium intake may be compromised among this

group. Earlier work supports this view.¹¹ Research indicates that milk is one of the nutritious foods often avoided by older girls, in the mistaken belief that it is “fattening”.¹² Research among adolescent females in Dublin reported that 45% of the sample perceived themselves to be overweight, yet only 23% of the sample were found to be so.¹¹ A recent survey in Northern Ireland highlighted similar concerns about body weight, with two thirds of girls in year 12 stating that they were “too fat”.¹³ The same survey found that girls’ concern about body shape and size increases markedly during adolescence. The number of girls who reported that they would like to change something about their bodies rose markedly from 41% of those in year 7, to 82% of those in year 12.

Red meat is also often mistakenly considered to be “fattening” by older girls and is often another dietary casualty.¹² In the present survey, older girls are reported to eat red meat less frequently than other age or gender groupings. Almost a quarter (24%) of the older girls in the survey are reported to eat red meat less often than once a week if at all. Red meat is a valuable source of haem iron, which is easily utilised by the body. The survey was not an in-depth quantitative study, therefore it is not possible to assess the adequacy of the diet with regard to iron. However, the low levels of consumption of red meat by a substantial proportion of older girls may give rise to concern over the adequacy of iron intake, particularly with the onset of menstruation and increased requirements during this time. It is well recognised that iron deficiency anaemia compromises all work performance, both physical and mental. In addition, having low iron stores, even in the absence of anaemia, has been shown to negatively affect cognitive function.

Overall the reported dietary intakes for children and young people from manual households seem to be poorer than those from non-manual households.

Children from manual households are almost twice as likely to miss breakfast as other groups, with 8% reported not to eat breakfast at all on weekdays. As noted above, missing out on breakfast has important nutritional consequences.

Consumption of fruit and vegetables is lower among this group, with only 8% of those from manual households eating five or more portions of fruit and vegetables each day, compared with 14% of those from non-manual households. More than one in five children (22%) from manual households is reported to eat vegetables less often than once a week or never and more than one in 10 (12%) eat fruit less than once a week or never.

In contrast, consumption of savoury snacks and sugary drinks is high among children from manual households. For example, 51% eat confectionery at least once every day and 45% take sugary fizzy drinks or squashes at least once a day.

Children and young people from manual households eat meat products, such as meat pies, sausage rolls and sausages more frequently than those from non-manual households: 20% of those from manual households eat meat products most days or more often, compared with 15% of those from non-manual households. In contrast, more children and young people from non-manual households (30%) eat meat products less often than once a week or never compared with 20% of those from manual households. Meat products tend to contain high amounts of fat, particularly saturated fat, and contain less iron than lean meats.

Children and young people from manual households also eat more chips and fried foods than those from non-manual groups, although the differences did not reach statistical significance.

The findings of the present survey suggest that children and young people from manual households have eating patterns that are lower in fruit and vegetables and higher in fat and sugar than their counterparts in more advantaged socioeconomic circumstances. These results correlate with the findings of earlier work.¹⁴ In another survey, children from schools in disadvantaged areas of North and West Belfast were reported to eat more crisps, confectionery and sugar-containing soft drinks than those from more advantaged areas.¹⁵

The results of the present survey highlight a number of concerns regarding the dietary habits of children and young people in Northern Ireland. Many of the young people surveyed are eating too many fatty and sugary foods and not enough fruit and vegetables, thus storing up potential health risks for the future. Two groups in particular – older girls and young people from manual households – require particular attention to help them achieve a diet which will protect rather than jeopardise their health.

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