



The National Child Health Poll (Australia)

The Royal Children's Hospital National Child Health Poll is a quarterly, national survey of Australian households shedding new light on the big issues in contemporary child and adolescent health.

The latest RCH National Child Health Poll has revealed Aussie kids aren't getting enough vegetables in their diet.

When it comes to sugar, over a quarter of parents mistakenly believe that fruit drinks may be a healthier option than water, a third of Aussie kids are regularly consuming sugar-sweetened drinks, and almost a third (29%) of parents incorrectly believe children may need sports drinks to recover from regular physical activity.

Dr Anthea Rhodes, director of the RCH National Child Health Poll and RCH paediatrician, said sugar can be confusing for parents when it comes to food choices.

"This study tells us that the majority of parents are confused about which foods are healthy and which foods aren't, especially when it comes to choosing the right foods for their kids. With one in four Australian children overweight or obese, it's vital that parents are supported to make healthy food choices for their families. Most parents (66%) said they find it hard to know how much added sugar is in food. Sugar in drinks can be especially confusing, water is always the healthiest option and kids should be encouraged to drink more water," she said.

Aussie kids aren't getting the daily recommended intake of vegetables with the poll revealing that more than nine out of ten (95%) of school-aged children don't eat the recommended daily serves of vegetables. Only one in four parents are aware of the recommended daily intake of vegetables for their child, which is around five serves per day.

"A lack of whole fruits and vegetables in the diet can mean children are at risk of not getting enough fibre and essential nutrients, such as iron and vitamin C. This can have immediate and long-term health consequences," Dr Rhodes said.

"We also found that four out of five primary school-aged kids don't know how to cook, or prepare food, and nearly half (44%) of teenagers rarely or never help to cook dinner. But if kids are involved in the kitchen it helps them to learn about food and they are also more likely to eat a meal if they have helped to prepare it," Dr Rhodes added.

The poll also revealed that treats may no longer be treats, with parents reporting that almost half of pre-schoolers are regularly receiving treat foods most days of the week.

"Foods and drinks containing saturated fat, added salt and added sugars have been directly linked to serious health problems in children, such as obesity and tooth decay."

"It's recommended that treat foods such as lollies, chocolate, processed meat and fried food should be consumed by children infrequently and in small amounts, not on a daily basis," Dr Rhodes added.

"It was great to see that most parents said their child has a home-cooked dinner most nights of the week, despite challenges such as a lack of time or energy."

Almost half
of young kids receive
treat foods most days
of the week



One-third
of kids regularly
consume sugary drinks



4 in 5
school-aged kids don't
eat enough vegetables



Overall key findings of the poll include;

- 57% of parents say it is hard to know which foods are healthy choices when buying food for their family
- 67% find it hard to know how much added sugar is in the food products they buy for their children
- 35% regularly consume sugar-sweetened drinks, with one in six pre-schoolers having them almost every day
- 26% mistakenly believe fruit drinks may be a healthier choice than water
- 29% of parents incorrectly believe children may need sports drinks to recover from regular physical activity.
- 37% of school aged children have not been taught how to cook or prepare food and almost half
- 44% of teenagers rarely or never help to make dinner
- 77% of parents saying that they believe healthy food is generally more expensive than unhealthy food.