

Factors Governing Healthy Eating Behaviour among Urban School Going Adolescents

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Background

Children need to develop good eating habits early in life. Overweight is a common nutrition problem among urban children in India today, because of reduced physical activity and faulty food habits. Healthy eating does not become habit overnight. Eating foods of little nutritional value such as candy, cookies, chips, savories, and soft drinks contributes empty calories to the diet. This usually prevents children from being open to eating the wide variety of foods needed for growth and good health.

Aims & Objectives

To study the factors governing 'Healthy Eating' behaviour among urban school going adolescents.

Materials & Methods

Five hundred and sixty four children between 14 - 18 years of age belonging to 11th and 12th grades from two higher secondary schools one each from Puducherry and Trichy, Tamilnadu, were enrolled and administered a questionnaire on 'healthy eating' and their choice of food items. They were also asked about the food items usually involved in weight gain, meal skipping, and socialization and food choice.

Results

Half of adolescent think that "eating out" is a healthy habit and 27% of them strongly believe in "eating out" is healthy. On the contrary, 60 % agree with the fact that consumption of outside food has higher risk of food poisoning. More than 60 percent of adolescent school children feel that all healthy foods should be tasteful. Only five percent feel that is fairly difficult to consume fruits or vegetables in their regular diet. In fact, seventy percent felt that it is easier for them to consume fruits or vegetables regularly. Another variable to consider is that more than sixty percent of the adolescents do decide to order only "half portion" of what they usually eat at home, while they have to eat out.

Conclusions

Though many adolescents were snacking and eat too much during socialization events, most of them exhibit the understanding of healthy food as a choice. They prefer to take their own decisions regarding choice of food items, which is a major factor in utilizing the theory of planned behaviour is formulating various health promotion events regarding healthy eating and livelihood.