Summary

HBSC Ireland has found that 17.9% of schoolchildren in Ireland report eating vegetables twice or more daily (15.6% of boys and 20.2% of girls). This figure has remained relatively stable since 2002 (16.9%). The percentage of boys consuming vegetables is lowest among 10-11 year olds (15.2%) and highest among 12-14 year olds (15.9%). The opposite pattern is seen among girls with the highest vegetable consumption among 10-11 year olds (21.4%) and lowest among 12-14 year olds (19.6%). Children who consume vegetables twice or more daily are less likely to spend four or more evenings with friends. They are more likely to find it easy to talk to their parents or best friend, live with both parents, like school, report excellent health and feel happy about their lives. Vegetable consumption in this factsheet refers to children who report consuming vegetables everyday, more than once.

Why this topic?

Increasing vegetable intake is a major public health challenge. Vegetables are an important component of a healthy diet; are rich in vitamins, minerals, fibre and plant chemicals, many of which are thought to protect against a range of chronic diseases. However vegetable intakes among Irish schoolchildren are often insufficient.

Trends 2002-2006

The overall percentage of children who report consuming vegetables twice or more daily has remained relatively stable between 2002 (16.9%) and 2006 (17.9%). Prevalence of reported vegetable consumption is higher among girls (20.2%) than boys (15.6%). The percentage of boys consuming vegetables everyday more than once has remained relatively stable across all age groups since 2002, while for girls it increased slightly, with the exception of 12-14 year old girls which have remained stable.

Vegetable consumption in context

- Children from lower social classes are less likely to consume vegetables twice or more daily (social class 5-6: 16.1%; social class 3-4: 17.1% and social class 1-2: 21.2%) than other social classes.
- Children who eat vegetables are more likely to find it easy to talk to their mother (83.6% vs. 80.0%), father (68.0% vs. 63.1%) and best friend (90.2% vs. 87.2%) than those who do not.
- Children who eat vegetables are more likely to live with both parents (84.1% vs. 80.0%) and to like school (75.8% vs. 66.3%) than those who do not.
- Children who eat vegetables are less likely to spend four or more evenings with friends (36.5% vs. 43.2%) than those who do not.
- Children who eat vegetables are more likely to report having excellent health (43.8% vs. 31.0%) and feeling happy about their lives (55.6% vs. 48.2%) than those who do not.
International

Fifteen year old schoolchildren in Ireland (boys and girls together) are ranked 4th among 41 countries in Europe and North America, with 18% reporting vegetable consumption twice or more daily. Overall 19% of 11 year olds in Ireland (rank 10th) and 19% of 13 year olds in Ireland (rank 8th) report consuming vegetables everyday more than once.

Implications

The overall percentage of children in Ireland that report consuming vegetables twice or more daily has remained relatively stable since 2002. Ireland ranks high in comparison to other European and North American countries. While ranked high internationally, these figures indicate that the majority of schoolchildren in Ireland are probably failing to meet recommendations for daily vegetable consumption. These data indicate a need for more research to understand why vegetable consumption is low across both genders and all age-groups and to develop more effective interventions for increasing vegetable consumption during this key developmental stage. Schools may provide an ideal setting for this.

References


