

RESearchers observed the eating behaviours of children and their parents in an effort to determine the driving forces behind snacking. The results of the experiment show that the variety of foods offered has a greater impact than the size of the containers in which the foods are presented.

Candy bars, chips, cookies... the spectrum of foods considered to be "snacks" is very wide. A study recently published in the *International Journal of Obesity* involving 1,299 children aged between 11 and 12 years and 1,274 parents showed that having greater choice makes snacking more difficult to resist.

Carried out by researchers at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute in Melbourne, Australia, the study aimed to determine the contexts in which children and parents were most likely to eat this type of food. Dr Jessica Kerr, who led the research, felt that previous studies into snacking behaviour were limited by self-reported data or small sample sizes.

"It is important to determine on a larger scale how dishware size and the quantity, variety, and energy density of snacks affect both child and adult snacking behaviour when apart from each other outside of the family environment," she said.

The adult and child volunteers underwent several health exams at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute and took 15-minute breaks during which they were presented with boxes filled with snacks such as crackers, cheese, granola bars, cookies, peaches and chocolate.

CONTAINER SIZE DOESN'T MATTER

The quantity, number and variety of snacks on offer and the size of their containers varied by participant. Children and parents ate separately and at different moments. The researchers then kept the food left in each box and calculated the amount of food that had been consumed in grammes and kilojoules (a measure of energy).

The experiment showed that the children who had been offered the

Variety makes snacking irresistible

Offering children a large variety of snack foods incites them to eat more



The experiment showed that the children offered snacks in greater variety and amounts consumed more food overall.

greatest variety and quantity of snack foods subsequently consumed more food both in terms of calorie richness and overall mass. The size of the containers the food was presented in, on the other hand, had very little effect on what and

how much was consumed. The difference was a lot less significant in the adults, although Kerr noted that they may have been influenced by knowing that their choices were being watched.

The authors of the study conclude

that reducing the number and variety of snacks offered could prove to be more effective to encourage healthier snacking rather than reducing container size, although further research is necessary to validate the theory. **AFP Relaxnews**