

Nestlé Feeding Infants and Toddlers Study

Evolution and quality of the diet in the first four years of life



Background and Purpose

- With over 10% of young children in the U.S. 2 to 5 years of age already classified as obese, it is critically important to lay the foundation for healthful diets early in life, when eating habits and food preferences are being formed.
- The Feeding Infants and Toddlers Study (FITS) is the largest and most comprehensive dietary intake survey of parents and caregivers of young children. The study provides information and insights on the diets and eating habits of infants, toddlers and preschoolers living in the United States.
- New analysis of the FITS data shows the development of dietary patterns at an early age that mimic some of the same unhealthy eating patterns seen in older children and adults.

Design and Population

- Telephone interviews collected data on food, beverage, and dietary supplement intake by 24-hour recall, household demographics, growth and development, and feeding practices.
- FITS surveyed a nationally representative sample of 3,273 infants, toddlers and preschoolers in the U.S. from birth to 48 months of age.

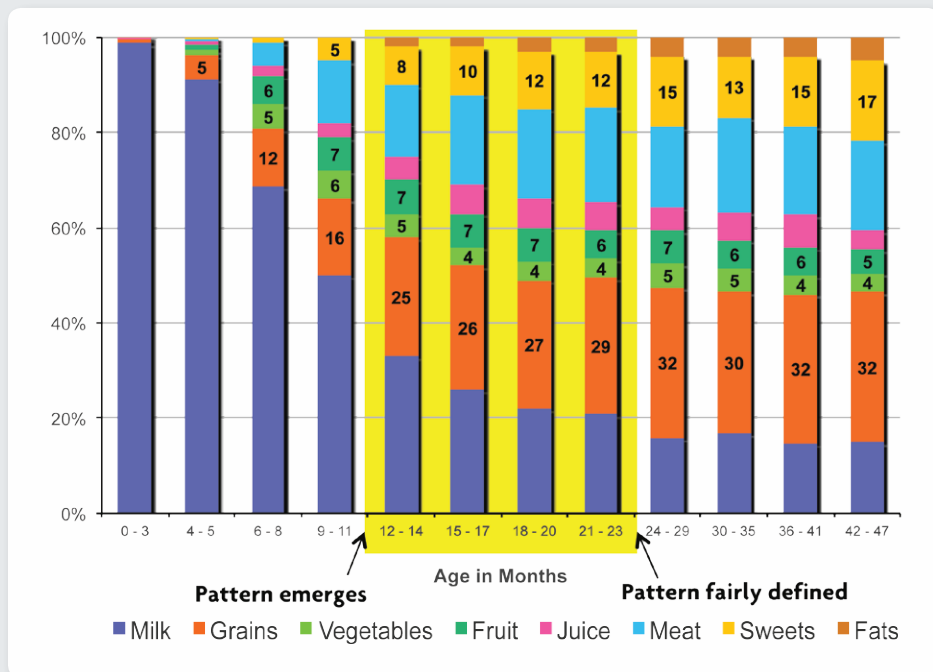
Overview of Findings

FITS reveals both progress and areas of concern in the diets of young children in the United States. The data shows dietary patterns are set early in life. Too many toddlers and preschoolers have diets low in vegetables and whole grains, and high in sodium, sweets, , and saturated fat. Understanding trends in food intake is vital in establishing dietary recommendations to improve the health of young children.

Percent of Calories from Food Sources from Birth to 48 Months

Food patterns are set early

A pattern of calorie intake that is high in sweets and grains and low in fruits and vegetables begins to emerge at 12 months of age. This pattern is fairly defined by 24 months and mimics some of the unhealthy eating habits seen in older children and adults.



Key Findings and Recommendations

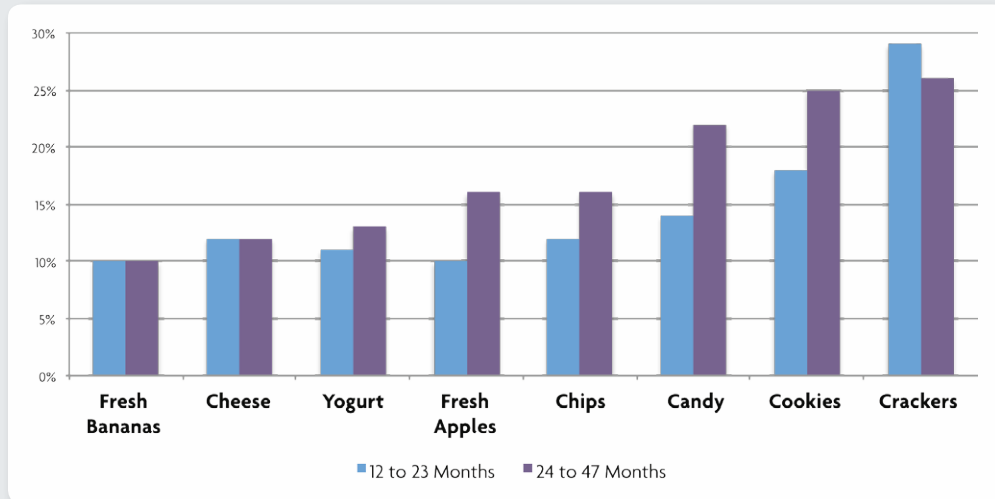
Dietary patterns that develop in the toddler stage, 12 to 23 months, remain consistent during the preschooler stage, 24-47 months. Findings from FITS illustrate the need for better nutrition guidance as young children transition from toddler stage to preschooler stage. Findings below are based on the one-day intake of the sample surveyed.

- **Thirty percent of preschoolers are not consuming a serving of vegetables and 25% are not consuming a serving of fruit.** Offer fruits and vegetables during snack and meal times, and choose mixed dishes that include a serving of vegetables.
- **Approximately 75% of preschoolers are consuming too much saturated fat.** Primary sources are milk, cheese, and meat products including hot dogs, sausage, and bacon. Foods high in saturated fat should be replaced with lean meats, low fat dairy products, and foods high in healthier fats such as avocados, fish, and those made with olive, safflower, and canola oils.
- **Most preschoolers are still consuming whole and 2% milk.** Milk products account for almost 50% of the saturated fat in preschoolers' diets. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends switching to lower fat milk products such as 1% milk, skim milk, and reduced fat cheese to reduce saturated fat intake in young children.
- **Over 70% of 2 year old preschoolers and 80% of 3 year old preschoolers consume more sodium than recommended.** Sodium intake can be reduced by selecting foods low in sodium, such as fruits and vegetables, and decreasing the consumption of higher sodium foods such as hot dogs, sausage, and bacon.
- **Sweets make up 15% of the calories in preschoolers' diets.** Sweets can be limited by serving fruit, vegetables, and water instead of cookies, candy, and sweetened beverages.
- **Between-meal foods and beverages contribute 30% of the total calories in preschoolers' diets.** Snacks should be considered mini-meals and healthy options such as fruits, vegetables, whole grain products, and low-fat yogurt or cheese should be offered.

Percent of Children Consuming Each Food as Snacks

Snacking accounts for a large percentage of children's total caloric intake

Some children are consuming fresh fruit and dairy during snack time. However, crackers, cookies, and candy are the most popular snack choices among toddlers and preschoolers.



Conclusions and Applications

- Significant changes in the diet happen between 12 and 23 months, when eating habits are being established. As children begin eating from the family table, their diets begin to mirror some of the unhealthy eating patterns often seen in older children and adults.
- Parents and caregivers need more education and guidance on the best food choices for their children, and in particular, for children less than 2 years of age. Parents are responsible for the foods and beverages children are offered, while children are responsible for whether and how much they eat.
- Consistent messages on how to make the best feeding decisions are essential for parents and caregivers. They need realistic strategies for establishing healthier eating habits that will impact the future health of their children.