

STATE OF THE NATION

WHAT CHILDREN IN THE UK ARE EATING



DECEMBER 2016

CHILDREN'S
FOOD TRUST
Eat Better Do Better

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Note: Our state of the nation combines new data commissioned by the Children's Food Trust and other research published in the past year, to give a taste of the challenges ahead for children's nutrition.

FOREWORD

LINDA CREGAN, CEO CHILDREN'S FOOD TRUST

Hands up: who often takes the kids for a burger and fries when you're out for the day shopping? After all, it's cheap, filling and they've been on about the latest free toy.

Had a long debate with a toddler in the supermarket about why you're not going to buy that box of sugary cereal just because of the princess character on the front?

Tried to explain to a teenager why a £1 box of fried chicken and chips on the way home from school isn't the best way to snack?

Felt guilty about giving in to the moaning and whining for a bar of chocolate or a bag of crisps?

Fumed when a well-meaning friend's given your six-year old free rein with the biscuit tin "because he asked so nicely"?

So far, so normal.

And that's the point of this, our very first State of the Nation report on children's food. This isn't a paper about extremes. It's a snapshot of how millions of children are eating in 2016, day in, day out, and the challenges facing parents up and down the country because of the food environment we now live in. Those challenges have become our norm. As parents and grandparents, raising our kids and grandkids with pester power and less healthy food at every turn is just the reality.

We're well aware of it, as parents. I think many of us want it to change. But we're feeding them okay most of the time, aren't we? At the end of a long working week with a grumpy child in tow, who hasn't given in to the vending machine full of crisps and chocolate at the sports centre after football club?

In fact, the reality is that the way many children eat isn't serving their health all that well at all. With the latest National Child Measurement Programme data telling us that even more children are overweight or obese by the time they start school, Type II diabetes appearing in younger children more than ever before and tooth decay putting children into hospital for general anaesthetic, we need to create a new norm. The habits that our food environment is pushing us to build with our children might not seem all that troublesome on the surface, but they're a ticking timebomb for health: the sweets after school as a reward for being good, the convenient but not-so-healthy lunchbox snacks that we give in to just because the other kids get them, the linking of events which give us cause for celebration and joy with the foods and drinks that are often worst for our bodies.

In a year in which government published a childhood obesity action plan and announced its intention to begin taxing sugary soft drinks to encourage reformulation and smaller portion sizes, we might have expected to close the year on an optimistic note for children's nutrition. However, the measures announced this year will not go anywhere near far enough to tackle the issues facing the malnourished middle. Government policy remains patchy. In this State of the Nation report, parents and children themselves tell us what's making it difficult for children to eat better. I hope 2017 will be a year in which policymakers begin listen to them.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Linda Cregan'.

HOW DO CHILDREN EAT IN 2016?

WHICH FOODS AND DRINKS DO CHILDREN CONSUME MOST OFTEN?

Milk, breakfast cereal, squash, fresh vegetables, bread – but biscuits and frozen potato products also make the top twenty (Kantar Worldpanel for the Children’s Food Trust, 2016).

The vegetables children most like to eat: Fresh carrots and cucumber, frozen peas and mixed veg.

The fruit children most like to eat: Bananas and apples.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO EAT FRUIT AND VEGETABLES?

“Because they have vitamins and minerals that keep you healthy.”

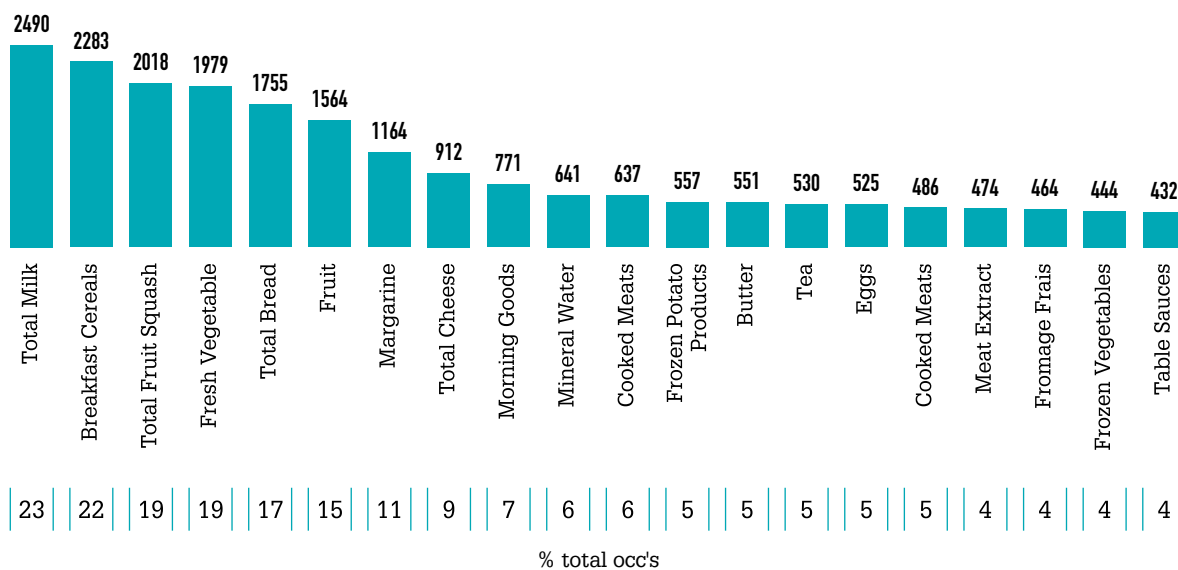
Hannah, 10

“So you can run around the playground.”

Angie, 7

There are some key staples in children's diets: milk, cereal, squash, fruit and veg and bread. After this there is a tail of smaller products within the top 20.

MILLIONS OF ANNUAL OCCASIONS, KIDS 0-15



Source: Kantar Worldpanel

E.g. in the past year, Breakfast Cereal has been eaten by children 2283m times.

Breakfast Cereal has been eaten at 22% of all Food/Drink consumption occasions.

“Eating healthily is about eating fresh veg and fruit, trying not to eat or drink too much sugar. It isn’t easy because sweets are sold everywhere and lots of drinks are full of sugar apart from water, but sometimes that can be boring. And my mum won’t let me drink sugar-free pop.”

Finlay, 11



But this year’s updates from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey¹ showed that less than one in ten 11-18 year-olds get their 5-a-day. The survey also revealed that:

- children’s sugar intakes remain at more than double the latest government recommendation of no more than 5% of daily energy from free sugars
- on average, children are failing to eat enough oily fish – whatever their age
- younger children are drinking fewer sugary soft drinks

However, the survey did show some encouraging signs of change, with 4-10 year olds consuming significantly less sugar compared with previous years.

CHILDREN’S FAVOURITE MEAL TO EAT AT HOME?

Pasta. Whether you ask children themselves, or their parents, the answer is the same – with spaghetti Bolognese cited most frequently. This is encouraging, as pasta is one of the meal options most conducive to adding (or hiding) extra vegetables.

HOW OFTEN DO CHILDREN GET TO HAVE PRODUCTS LIKE CAKES, BISCUITS, CHOCOLATE, SWEETS AND CRISPS?

Four in ten parents say their children are eating these sorts of foods a few times a week, but one quarter said it was at least once a day. One in five parents say that their kids have fast food and ice cream once a week.

Younger parents were more likely to say their children had these items more often, with more than one third of 18-34 year-old parents saying their children had cakes and biscuits, crisps, sweets and

chocolate at least once a day. 4-7 year-olds were the most likely to be having cakes and biscuits, sweets and chocolate at least once per day, while 12-16 year olds were most likely to have a daily bag of crisps.

Regionally, it was parents in the North East who were most likely to say their children had sweets and chocolate at least once per day.²

DRINK UP

Almost one in five children (22%) are drinking mainly bottled water rather than tap water at home.³

WHAT ARE CHILDREN EATING IN CHILDCARE AND AT SCHOOL?

An estimated 5.4m children in the UK have school meals. The rest – an estimated 4.8m children – either go home for lunch, bring a lunchbox or eat off-site.^{4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9}

2016 saw the continued absence of any robust national evidence of what children are eating in childcare or in school dining rooms. Whilst research this year reinforced that packed lunches are often the less healthy option, the lack of robust, UK-wide monitoring of the nutritional quality of food provided by early years settings or schools – particularly given the significant investments in universal free school meals for younger children and in extending free childcare – is an ongoing concern.

WHAT'S IN CHILDREN'S PACKED LUNCHES?

Chocolate biscuits, cereal bars, crisps and sugary drinks continue to be staples of children's lunchboxes in the UK, with many children either asking for these foods in their packed lunches or having them because they say they enjoy their taste.¹⁰

One of the most worrying trends appears in what children are drinking with their packed lunches – with almost one in five lunches (18%) including 'one-shot' fruit drinks. A standard portion of the most-consumed one-shot brands gives a six year-old more than their entire daily recommended limit of free sugars (the equivalent of five sugar cubes) in one go.

Our research with Nursery World, published this year, suggests that an increasing number of young children may be asked to bring their own food to nursery or pre-school, rather than being served with meals and snacks by their provider, as the government extends free childcare and concerns about funding remain.¹¹

Children say they're most likely to eat foods like **crisps, chocolate and sweets with other family members or friends**. However, snacking at home, particularly after school and in front of the TV or computer, was also a prime time to consume these sorts of foods.²

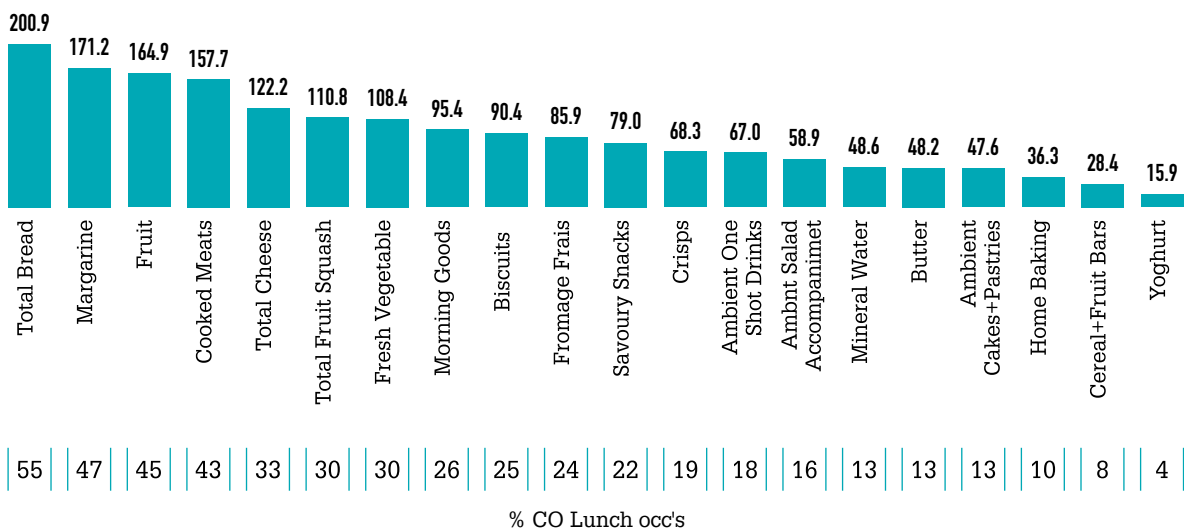
“When I see chocolate, crisps and sweets on TV I want to eat them – because they look good and I love chocolate.”

Angie, 7



Children's lunchboxes tend to include sandwich components and snack items like crisps, fruit or cake.

MILLIONS OF ANNUAL OCCASIONS, KIDS 0-15, CARRIED OUT LUNCH



Source: Kantar Worldpanel
E.g. in the past year, bread has been eaten at a child's carried out lunch 201m times, which makes up 55% of all children's carried out lunch occasions.

“Putting a packed lunch policy in place can be tough, but every school allowing packed lunches needs one if we’re going make life easier for parents and give kids a consistent message. School lunches must continue to lead the way – all of us need to be eating fewer biscuits and cakes and we should start to model that in schools, perhaps by offering only a portion of fresh fruit or yoghurt for dessert on at least a few days a week.”

Linda Cregan

Children’s Food Trust CEO, August 2016

The food young people buy on their way to and from school was still a particular cause for concern in 2016:

“More than three quarters of 13-15 year olds still buy food or drink outside school at least twice a week, often favouring cheap, fast and less healthy food and drink options than are available in schools”¹²

This year, one quarter of takeaways in the UK were located within a five-minute walk of a school.¹³ Meanwhile, mapping by Public Health England highlighted Birmingham and Leeds as England’s takeaway hotspots.¹⁴

The think-tank London Councils called for a stronger role for health in the National Planning Policy Framework, to help local authorities support children’s health in their decision-making.¹⁵ The Local Government Agency, meanwhile, highlighted examples of where councils were using their planning powers to limit takeaways.¹⁶

Further research flagged the challenges for schools in ‘competing’ with local retailers, whilst also trying to be the ‘gold standard’ for healthy food: “It is noticeable that <food> retailers particularly engage with young people in particularly deprived neighbourhoods...<encouraging> young people to spend what little money they have with them... There is a need to assess whether and how school caterers can learn from retailers, to adjust their initiatives and services to attract young people to school canteens in an attempt to encourage them to purchase healthier food and drink.”¹⁷

COULD SCHOOLS DO EVEN MORE TO HELP PARENTS?

40% of parents say dessert in school should be limited to only fruit or yoghurt on at least a few days each week.²

ARE WE GETTING IN EARLY ENOUGH?

This year, a new UCL study highlighted that UK toddlers are consuming more calories and protein than recommended; children’s diets are lacking in fibre, vitamin D and iron but contain too much sodium.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the British Nutrition Foundation warned that more than 30,000 toddlers have never tried a vegetable.¹⁹



JUST HOW HARD A JOB IS THIS FOR PARENTS?

86% OF PARENTS WORRY ABOUT HOW THEIR CHILD EATS – PARTICULARLY YOUNGER PARENTS AND THOSE WITH KIDS AGED 4-7.

WHEN ASKED 'DOES YOUR CHILD HAVE TOO MUCH SUGAR AS PART OF THEIR EVERYDAY DIET?', PARENTS ANSWERED 'YES' FOR 50% OF CHILDREN.

Levels of worry by parents about their child's diet varies across the country, with parents in the North East worrying most (44% worrying 'a lot').

More than one third of parents say their children pester for products like sweets, chocolate, ice cream, crisps, fast food, and sugary soft drinks at least once a day, and it's most likely to happen at the supermarket or while watching TV.

Crucially, around four in ten parents say it's difficult to say 'no' when their child is pestering for these sorts of foods.²

HOW TOUGH IS IT TO KNOW WHEN A PRODUCT IS HEALTHY FOR A CHILD?

When asked to rate the healthiness of a series of products marketed for or to children:

- more than half of parents rated Kelloggs Rice Krispies Multigrain Shapes cereal as healthy – when it contains more than 6g sugar per serving: one-quarter of the daily recommended maximum for a 7-10 year-old. Although higher in fibre and lower in salt, the Multigrain product has double the sugar of the original variety.
- Dairylea Lunchables Ham 'N' Cheese Crackers, which contain one-third of a seven year-old's daily saturated fat and salt intake, were rated as healthy by 43% of parents.
- the My5 Fruit Shoot, which is the only product in the Fruit Shoot range to give a seven year-old one portion of their 5-a-day, was picked by more than one-third of parents as healthy. Whilst this is a combination of only fruit juice and water, it does contain two thirds of a seven year-old's daily free sugars limit.

“To everyone dealing with a toddler or child’s faddy eating, I feel your pain. Our son has just finally eaten spaghetti hoops for the first time. I feel like dancing around the kitchen. Baked beans were a step too far, but with this achievement we may just tackle mashed potato by Christmas.”

Becky, Cumbria

“My six year-old . . . succumbs to peer pressure and he’s much more aware of brands and how you can sign up to promotions with perhaps less than healthy foods, which can make supermarket trips quite difficult.”

Natalie, Macclesfield

It seems many parents are doing well to recognise less healthy foods, considering that many products don’t use colour-coded front-of-pack labelling.²

PRODUCT	% PARENTS RATING PRODUCT AS ‘VERY’ OR ‘QUITE’ HEALTHY	FRONT OF PACK NUTRITION LABELLING RATING			
		FAT	SATURATES	SUGARS	SALT
Dairylea Lunchables Ham ‘N’ Cheese	43%	MED	HIGH	LOW	HIGH
Nutella Hazelnut Chocolate Spread	20%	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	LOW
Pom-Bears Original Snacks	31%	HIGH	MED	LOW	MED
Kelloggs Rice Krispies Multigrain Cereal	58%	LOW	LOW	MED	MED
My5 Fruit Shoot	38%	LOW	LOW	HIGH	LOW
Cocopops Cereal Bar	18%	MED	HIGH	HIGH	MED
Bear Pure Fruit Yoyo Strawberry	56%	LOW	LOW	HIGH	LOW

Survey of 2001 parents by Opinium Research for the Children’s Food Trust, 2016



Whose influence has parents worried? “It’s most difficult to help my child eat healthily when they’re playing at a friend’s house.” One in five (22%) parents in Opinium Research for the Children’s Food Trust.²

The place where the UK’s parents eat out with children most often is McDonalds (43%), followed by KFC (18%) and Pizza Hut (16%). More than one third (38%) of parents say they eat out with their children at least once a week.²

A McDonalds Happy Meal of cheeseburger, fries and a chocolate milkshake gives a 7-10 year-old almost their entire daily limit of saturated fat and sugar. Yet choosing the Happy Meal option with fish fingers, carrot sticks and water wouldn’t provide enough energy for lunch.

A KFC kids’ burger, fries, Innocent Tube and a Fruit Shoot drink combo also gives a 7-10 year-old more than the recommended amount of energy, fat, sugar and salt they should have for lunch, but the chicken burger has less saturated fat than a typical beef patty and no salt is added to fries.

A Pizza Hut Big Heroes breaded chicken and fries, chocolate waffle and a Pepsi Max gives a 7-10 year old more sugar and saturated fat than they should consume in an entire day. Even a Big Heroes Thin Margherita Pizza, orange juice ice lolly and water option remains too high in saturated fat, salt and sugar for lunch, although the lolly counts as one of a child’s 5-a-day.

Source: McDonalds, KFC and Pizza Hut children’s menu nutritional information on their respective websites, collated w/c 21st November 2016.

CHILDREN’S FAVOURITE MEAL WHEN THEY’RE EATING OUT?

Whether you ask children or their parents, pizza is the dish that children love to eat most when they’re having a meal out.²

ARE PARENTS HAPPY WITH CHILDREN’S MENUS?

Just over one-quarter of parents (26%) want to see restaurants offering more fruit and vegetables in children’s meals, and almost as many would like to see child-sized portions of dishes from the adult menu. One in ten parents wanted an end to unlimited soft drink refills or for restaurants to offer only healthier drinks. Parents from lower income households were more likely to say that children’s menus should offer more fruit and veg – with almost one in three of these parents (31%) selecting that option. However, nearly one in five parents (18%) from lower income households did not think restaurants needed to make menus healthier at all.²



“They’re now of an age where they’re asking ‘why don’t I have that chocolate bar’, or whatever. What’s hardest is peer pressure.”

Fiona, Somerset

“Crisps, chocolate and sweets look nice and yummy on TV and I want to eat them now.”

Lewis, 9

ARE PARENTS MANAGING TO GIVE THEIR CHILDREN THE ‘FAMILY MEALTIME’ EXPERIENCE?

This seems to be alive and well for many homes: more than four out of five (82%) of families taking part in our Big Cookathon say they sit down at least three times a week to eat together, switching off the TV and ignoring the internet to talk over dinner.²⁰

“The best thing about having a meal with my family is talking to each other and discussing my day.”

Fraser, 8

“It’s one of the only times we’re all together.”

Lewis, 9

WHAT DO UK PARENTS SAY WOULD HELP THEM TO HELP THEIR CHILDREN EAT BETTER?

- Giving children more opportunities to learn how to cook (31%).
- Not selling sweets, chocolate, crisps and sugary drinks in places where children go to be active (24%).
- Supermarkets having fewer special offers on less healthy food, and more on healthier foods (23%).
- Shops not having foods like sweets and crisps on checkouts or at eye level for children (22%).
- Tighter rules on advertising of junk food to children on TV, online and at events (20%).²

COOKING FOR BETTER HEALTH

Parents across all locations and demographics were universally of the view that giving children more chances to learn to cook was the thing they’d find most helpful in supporting their children to eat better.

This was a measure conspicuous by its absence from the government’s childhood obesity strategy, published this year.

SWEET NOTHINGS

Cutting down on the sweets and chocolates and cakes and biscuits they buy, getting rid of sugary squash in the house and buying different breakfast cereals were the steps parents thought would cut down the amount of sugar their child has. When asked why they haven’t already made those changes, more than one quarter of parents who wanted to take action said these are habits which are hard to change and almost one in five said their child would complain too much.

“They look so tasty!”

Hannah, 10

WHAT DO CHILDREN SAY THEY’D MOST LIKE TO DO TO MAKE THEIR DIET HEALTHIER?

The most popular choices are eating more fruit and vegetables, drinking more water and eating fewer sweets or chocolate. It’s clear that while children often have a good understanding of what a healthy diet means, it isn’t always translating into how they actually eat.²

WHAT ELSE DEFINED CHILDREN'S FOOD IN 2016?

CHILDREN'S DIET IS A GLOBAL THREAT

"Childhood obesity is reaching alarming proportions in many countries and poses an urgent and serious challenge...Progress in tackling childhood obesity has been slow and inconsistent."²¹

"Child obesity is now fuelling malnutrition around the world."²²

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed a decade of action on nutrition from 2016-2025, recognising "the need to eradicate hunger and prevent all forms of malnutrition worldwide" and "putting nutrition at the heart of sustainable development."²³

"The UK has the largest difference in the levels of healthy eating (consumption of fruit and vegetables) between children from low and high socio-economic status."²⁴

TAX THE CAN

Legislation to tax sugary soft drinks, one of the biggest contributors of free (added) sugars to children's diet, began making its way through parliament. We called for policymakers to use the existing rules on healthier drinks in schools as a ready-made model to help shape the new law.²⁵

ADVERTISING RULES AREN'T PROTECTING CHILDREN

"Children are mostly exposed to junk food advertising in the evenings and weekends after 4:30pm, during family programmes. They recall, enjoy and engage with junk food adverts: in the short-term, ads made some children hungry and want to eat junk food. In the longer-term, junk food adverts can encourage children to ask their parents to buy certain food either immediately after viewing the advert or when they're out shopping and see the food in the store."²⁶



**“When you feel hungry,
your tummy rumbles and
it makes you feel a bit sick.
It feels like a monster.”**

Lewis, 9 and Angie, 7

Films aimed at children and young people were attacked for the volume of licensing deals they made with products like sweets, chocolate, cakes and sugary cereals and drinks, over and above healthier options. Minions and Frozen were singled out for criticism after deals with brands such as Haribo, Honey Monster, Kinder Surprise and Capri Sun.²⁷

The World Medical Association adopted a new statement recommending that advertising of ‘non-nutritious’ products should be banned during TV programming and other media that appeal to children. “Regulators should be aware that children access television programs designed for adults and ensure that legislation and regulation also limits marketing associated with such programs. Governments should work with independent health experts to produce sound guidance on food and nutrition, with no involvement of the food and drink industry.”²⁸

TEENAGERS ARE TARGETS

“One in five of the top food retail websites in Ireland are very appealing to teens...On Facebook, all the food/drink brand Pages with the greatest reach among users aged 13-14 in Ireland are for brands that feature HFSS products...Over a quarter of the 354 brand posts analysed did not show food, packaging or a brand logo, indicating a shift to more subtle promotional strategies that are less easily identified as advertising.”²⁹

For teens, takeaways and fast food restaurants were the most commonly-used sources of food, after home and school.³⁰ And teenagers’ consumption of energy drinks remained a concern, with almost three-quarters of 11-18 year-olds drinking these products and more than one in ten having at least one litre in a single session.³¹

FAMILY TIES

“Immediate family members are the strongest role models for influencing children’s healthy eating...habits.”³²

PARENTS’ ROLE IN HELPING CHILDREN EAT WELL HAS NEVER BEEN MORE COMPLEX

Children whose parents see them as overweight are more likely to gain weight – regardless of whether or not their weight is a problem.³³

“There is a strong relationship between a mother’s education and parenting practices, which ultimately impacts on children’s diet and BMI.”³⁴

Only one quarter of parents feel very confident about the amount of food to give to their toddler – with almost one in five “routinely offering bigger portions than recommended for popular meals, drinks and snacks.”³⁵

COOKING SKILLS ARE KEY

When we asked a group of 54 health professionals in Scotland about the role they thought cooking skills can play in improving children’s nutritional health, almost all said it could be a big or very big role. A similar proportion said that poor cooking skills are a big problem for the health of families in Scotland at the moment.³⁶

CHILDREN ARE STILL GOING HUNGRY

One in five British parents of 5-16 year-olds expected to skip a meal during the summer holidays so that there was enough for their kids to eat.³⁷

A survey of more than 3,000 teachers found that more than a quarter of teachers have given children food.³⁸



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The Children's Food Trust

The Children's Food Trust is the national charity on a mission to get every child eating well, at home, in childcare, at school and beyond.

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