

Eating a Rainbow. Introducing vegetables in the first years of life in 3 European countries

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ABSTRACT

Low vegetable consumption in children is a concern in many EU countries, fewer than one fifth of children in Europe consume the WHO recommended amounts. Systematic studies demonstrate that experience with a variety of vegetables early in childhood can promote later consumption as early dietary habits often track into adulthood. This study examined pre-school children's experience with vegetables across three European countries in order to assess cultural differences, effects of age and culinary practices. Mothers of pre-school children (N = 234) in the UK (N = 71), Denmark (N = 93) and France (N = 70) completed a survey assessing parental and infant familiarity, frequency of offering and liking for 56 vegetables as well as preparation techniques for these vegetables. Analyses revealed that although children aged 25–36 months had been introduced to the greatest number of vegetables, children aged 6–12 months were offered vegetables more frequently and had a higher reported liking for these vegetables. UK children's liking was related to frequency of maternal intake and frequency of offering. Denmark had introduced the greatest number of vegetables and offered vegetables more frequently than both the UK and France. Choice of preparation methods differed between countries while choice of seasonings was similar. Results suggest increasing variety and frequency of vegetable offering between 6 and 12 months, when children are most receptive, may promote vegetable consumption in children.

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