

Abstract

Parents' Perceptions of Packed Lunches in New Zealand Primary Schools [†]

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Background: Children today in developed countries have an abundance of discretionary, cheap, palatable and ready to eat foods available. Coinciding with this there has been a substantial increase in the prevalence of childhood obesity. In New Zealand 1 in 9 of 2–14-year-olds are obese. Food consumed at school forms a substantial part of a child's daily dietary intake. However, there is limited research in New Zealand on packed lunches; therefore the aim of this research is to investigate what parents perceive is in their primary school child's packed lunch, with a secondary aim to investigate what parents think about the 'healthiness' of the child's packed lunch.

Methods: Parents ($n = 266$) of primary school aged children in New Zealand completed an online survey about their child's packed lunch. The survey contained questions on how frequently types of food/drinks were included and how much they agreed or disagreed with selected statements regarding their child's lunch.

Results: The majority of respondents had one child (52.7%) equally distributed across the school years (1–6). The majority were of New Zealand European descent (85.9%) and came from Canterbury (81.8%). The majority had children in decile 9 and 10 schools (49%). A packed lunch was sent to school everyday for 95.5% of children. A bread item was included in almost all lunches, with brown bread in 72.7%, and fruit was included daily in 97%. However, muesli bars, baked items, and chips were also included daily in 28.4%, 36.4%, and 21.2% of cases respectively. Overall, 96.5% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child's lunch was 'healthy'.

Conclusions: While there are some positives aspects of the lunches it appears that even in higher decile schools further education around optimal packed lunch choices is required.



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