

**CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN CHILDREN'S T.V. VIEWING HABITS AND
IMPLICATIONS FOR NUTRITIONAL STATUS**

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Overweight and obesity are recognised as common problems in Australian society (Gracey 1978). Television viewing requires little energy expenditure and Australian children spend a large proportion of their time watching T.V. (Senate Standing Committee 1978).

24 hour record/recalls were used to calculate nutrient intakes of children of Italian migrants (n = 129) and Australian born parents (n = 188) living in the Fremantle area of Western Australia. T.V. viewing habits were determined using pretested questionnaires. Standardised techniques were used to measure indicators of obesity.

Peak regular viewing times for all children were after school (4 p.m. to 6 p.m.) 89% viewing; early evening weeknights (6 p.m. to 8 p.m.) 89% viewing; Saturday evening 93% viewing and Sunday evening 89% viewing.

However, Italian migrant children regularly watched 35% more T.V. than Australian children, especially during daylight hours, and girls from both ethnic groups watched more T.V. in daylight hours than boys of the same ethnic group. Mean energy intakes are summarised in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Mean energy intakes (MJ) of Italian and Australian boys and girls and percentage of N.H.M.R.C. (1970) recommendations

Ethnic group Sex	Italian		Australian	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Sample size	n=43	n=86	n=107	n=81
Energy intake (MJ)	10.27	7.74	10.86	8.32
S.D.	3.03	2.47	4.51	2.48
% NHMRC	88.4	80.2	89.0	87.6

Mean energy intakes were less than N.H.M.R.C. (1970) recommendations for age and sex for both ethnic groups and sexes, yet Italian boys and girls and Australian girls were heavier for their age and height than N.H.M.R.C. standards (1975). Median triceps skinfold thicknesses of Italian children were greater than Australian children of the same age and sex.

The differences in anthropometric measurements show the same trends as differences in daytime T.V. viewing times for ethnic group and sex, which suggests that overweight in children may be due to lack of physical activity rather than excess energy consumption.

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