

## DIETARY PATTERNS AND CHILD DENTAL HEALTH

C. M. PATTERSON

While the dental health of children in Australia has shown overall improvement in recent years probably largely due to water fluoridation and the use of fluoridated dentifrices (Carr 1983), there remain a number of children for which this is not the case. Dental caries is a multifactorial disease and diet, particularly the frequency of consuming sweetened foods, is an important factor in its development.

The present study was carried out to determine the dietary patterns of children aged between six months and two years of age as well as the attitudes of their mothers towards dental health. The mothers of 149 children were interviewed when they attended baby clinics using a structured questionnaire and then asked to complete a three day dietary diary which would include one day of the weekend.

Results on the frequency of consuming sweetened foods are summarised in the following Table:-

	Age in Months		
	6-12	13-18	19-24
Av. No. meals/day	3	3	3
Av. No. sweetened meals/day	1.6	1.5	1.6
% sweetened meals	53	50	53
Av. No. snacks/day	4.5	3.9	3.3
Av. No. sweetened snacks/day	1.1	1.8	1.6
% sweetened snacks	24	46	50

The actual food consumed as reported in the diaries correlated well with frequency data for a number of foods collected at the time of interview. From the Table it can be seen that while the frequency of food intake decreased with the child's age, the percentage of sweetened between-meal snacks increased. This is particularly due to a decrease in the frequency of milk consumption and increase in consumption of sweetened biscuits, sweets etc. with age. Mothers underestimated the frequency they gave their children sweetened food and were unaware that many of the foods they provided were sweetened.

Current dental health education emphasises the importance of restricting the consumption of sweet, particularly sticky foods to meal times and the use of dentally 'safe' foods for snacks. This message needs reinforcing as does knowledge of the content of many processed foods as it is important for dental health that sound dietary habits are established from an early age. (Hocking et al 1982).

CARR, L. M. (1983). Aust. Dent. J. 28 : 269.

HOCKING, B. M., CAMPBELL, M. J. A. and STOREY, E. (1982). Aust. Dent. J. 27 : 300.

This project was supported by the Australian Dental Research & Education Trust

Dental Care Research Centre, University of Queensland, Taringa, Queensland 4068

Present Address: Department of Public Health and Nutrition, Queensland Institute of Technology, Brisbane, Queensland 4000