

DIETARY PATTERNS OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN IN THE KIMBERLEY

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Aboriginal children in the Kimberley region of Western Australia show a growth pattern in which body weights lie around the tenth centile of the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics grids whilst stature for age approximates the twenty-fifth centile (Smith et al. 1982). A recent double-blind study demonstrated that these children did not show a growth response to supplemental zinc (Smith et al. 1985).

In the present study the dietary pattern of 129 Aboriginal children aged between 8 and 12 years, living in six settlements in the Kimberley was assessed by 24-hour recall. Children were interviewed at school by one of us on three occasions; once in October, 1983, once in February, 1984, and once in July, 1985. A total of 274 interviews were conducted. Estimates of the amount of each food eaten during the previous 24 hours were obtained with the aid of food photographs for the major items. In the case of milk powder and sugar, children measured the amount of each item used on each occasion from samples supplied, and these were weighed.

The results of the study are summarised in the Table. Bread and damper, usually with butter and often also with jam or honey, together with tea, usually with large quantities of powdered milk and sugar, were the most frequently eaten foods. Fried or stewed beef, sometimes with vegetables (mainly potato and onion) were the main sources of meat and vegetables. The children's recalls indicated that limited quantities of bush foods were eaten by this age group. Dietary analysis using computer programs based on Paul and Southgate's food composition tables showed evidence of low energy intake and marginal to low intake of folic acid and vitamins A, B₁ and B₆. Intakes of protein, calcium, vitamin C and vitamin B₁₂ were estimated to be adequate.

Frequency of Consumption of Main Food Items by Aboriginal Children

More than twice/day	1-2 times/ day	3-6 times/ week	1-2 times/ week	Less than once/week
Tea	Bread	Beef	Cereal	Sausage
Sugar	Butter	Fresh Fruit	Porridge	Cheese
Milk	Cordial or Softdrink	Rice Jam	Damper	Nuts
			Canned Meat	Cakes, Buns
			Chicken	Fish
			Eggs	Kangaroo
			Biscuits	Dugong
			Sweets	Turtle
			Soup	

The study shows an unusual diet in which meat, flour, sugar and powdered milk constitute staple items. Total energy intakes appear to be low and the diet is unbalanced in respect to several ancillary food factors.

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