

Dietary restraint behaviour in adolescence and weight status in young adulthood

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Background - Dieting is a ubiquitous approach to weight control in teenagers, particularly in girls. The longer-term benefits of dieting for weight control have been little studied. Dieting can include dietary restraint behaviour and the impact of this on weight status is examined in the Victorian Adolescent Health Cohort Study.

Methods - Between 1992 and 1995, dietary restraint habits were determined over 6 waves on a population representative sample of students initially aged 14-15 years. A binary outcome of dietary restraint (nil dietary restraint or dietary restraint) was created over the 6 waves. Initial body mass index (BMI) (adjusted for age) was stratified to 3 levels. At follow up, (mean age 24.0 years, response rate, 79% of surviving participants), BMI categories were established based on NHMRC cut offs.

Results – As adolescents, 1/5 males and 2/3 females exhibited dietary restraint. Adolescent dietary restraint was higher in adolescents with higher BMI (odds ratio (OR), adjusted for sex 3.04 (95% confidence intervals (95%CI) 2.63-3.53), $P < 0.01$). After adjustment for adolescent BMI, dietary restraint behaviour does not predict adult weight status; eg compared to females of normal BMI, underweight females were not more likely to have engaged in dietary restraint, OR 1.13 95%CI 0.77-1.67, $P = 0.53$).

Conclusions – Adolescent dietary restraint behaviour is associated with weight status in young adults, but this is conditional on their adolescent BMI.