



## TODDLER DIETS RAISE CONCERN FOR THE HEALTH OF FUTURE GENERATIONS: EXPERTS CALL FOR CLEARER GUIDANCE and LAUNCH EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Many of Britain's toddlers are being raised on a diet consisting mainly of takeaways and adult ready meals before they are even out of nappies.

A poll\* for the **Little People's Plates education initiative**, which launches today, reveals 29% of children under three consume a takeaway at least once a week. A further 19% of toddlers are fed takeaways or adult ready meals for most meals. Whilst 23% have crisps and 16% consume fizzy drinks almost every day. In spite of this, 83% of the mothers polled believed their child had a healthy, balanced diet.

The findings are published in a report entitled **Food and Nutrition for the under 3s** [available from [www.infantandtoddlerforum.org](http://www.infantandtoddlerforum.org)] by the Infant & Toddler Forum. They underline the challenge facing health and childcare professionals (HCPs) who are under mounting pressure to implement government strategies to halt the rise in childhood obesity despite a lack of ongoing support and training in toddler nutrition. The report suggests placing toddler nutrition at the heart of government strategy to combat child and adult obesity.

One important aim in successfully improving the eating habits of toddlers is to ensure consistent messages are given to all who are involved with the care of toddlers. This includes health and childcare professionals and parents.

Via **Little People's Plates** the Forum is extending its current healthcare educational offering to help parents feed their toddlers meals that meet their nutritional needs. This comes amidst concerns that toddlers diets are often low in key nutrients but have too much salt, saturated fat and sugar, which could lead to obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes in their future.

Current government guidance suggests that children can eat 'family foods' once weaned. But if the family diet is not nutritious, then toddlers will be missing out on the nutrients they need from their meals.

Dipti Aistrop, Health Visitor and Specialist Health Visitor for Mental Health of Young Children and I&TF advisory board member:

"Healthcare professional knowledge on toddler nutrition can be varied. Therefore, helping parents feed their toddlers the food that is nutritionally right for them, whether it is home-made or pre-prepared, is not easy when ongoing training and support is limited. The Little People's Plates initiative is a valuable educational resource that can reach parents beyond our day to day practice and help them to make informed, healthy food choices for their children."

### **Guidance gap leads to lack of nutritional know-how for mothers**

Toddlers need nutritious food for rapid growth and development in the pre-school years but the poll findings show parents are confused, simply don't understand their child's unique nutritional needs and want more information on how to feed their toddlers:

- A quarter of parents have no idea how much salt their toddler can have each day and only 26% think the under threes should have a low salt diet
- 80% didn't know their toddler should have a low sugar diet
- 81% of mothers didn't think their toddler needed carbohydrates at every meal

In addition

- 42% of mothers say they have not received clear and consistent advice on feeding the under threes and 26% want more help from health professionals
- Twice as many mothers find their nutritional advice in the media, books and internet (34%) than via their health visitor (15%)
- Only 6% found the NHS Birth to Five book a useful source of guidance on feeding.

### **Toddlers are in charge**

The *Little People's Plates* poll also paints a bleak picture of toddler tea-times:

- 31% of mothers describe routinely feeling 'angry, tense, anxious, frustrated or angry' at their toddler's mealtimes
- 48% use food to control their toddler's behaviour
- 25% pander to the whims of their toddler, making alternative meals when they refuse to eat what has been offered
- 7% of desperate mothers cry or lose sleep over their child's eating habits.

Professor Atul Singhal, honorary consultant paediatrician at the Institute of Child Health in London and Chair of the Infant & Toddler Forum (I&TF) commented, "Currently, there is a gap in guidance for parents of the under threes, after the weaning stage. The Infant & Toddler Forum want to help parents and are calling for a focus on these forgotten years. Early intervention is key if we are to win the fight against obesity. Focusing on health and nutrition in the early years will improve public health in the years to come by giving all children the best start in life."

More information about *Little People's Plates* and materials to use with parents and carers can be found at [www.littlepeoplesplates.co.uk](http://www.littlepeoplesplates.co.uk)

### **Ends**

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### **Notes To Editor:**

#### **Little People's Plates**

Little People's Plates ([www.littlepeoplesplates.co.uk](http://www.littlepeoplesplates.co.uk)) is a new education initiative aimed at parents and carers of children from one to three years that seeks to highlight the importance of the correct nutrition this age group needs. Its objective is to provide parents and carers with practical tips, plus evidence-based guidance to help them to make the right food choices for their toddlers whether food is home cooked or pre-prepared. Little People's Plates is driven by the Infant & Toddler Forum (I&TF), an independent team of specialists in child nutrition and development.

#### **Infant & Toddler Forum**

Set up in 2005, the Infant & Toddler Forum (I&TF) brings together a multi-disciplinary team of eight experts and practitioners who share a common professional interest in infant and child health, growth and nutrition. The primary goal of the Forum is to improve the access of Health Care Professionals to reliable, evidence-based nutritional information relevant to their practice, so that they can advise and support the parents of infant and young children (from birth to 3 years). More information can be found at [www.infantandtoddlerforum.org](http://www.infantandtoddlerforum.org).

For the first time in 2009, the I&TF will broaden its reach to communicate directly with parents via the Little People's Plates initiative.

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*\* All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from OnePoll. Total sample size was 1000 mothers with a child aged 9-36 months. Fieldwork was undertaken between 6th - 13th February 2009. The poll was carried out online. The figures are unweighted.*