

Abstract

Background: The prevalence of childhood obesity has risen exponentially over the last 20 years. Currently, 32% of children in Nova Scotia are overweight or are at risk of becoming overweight.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to determine, through a thematic questionnaire, the attitudes and perceptions of children in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia towards healthy eating. Attitudes and perceptions about food and healthy eating can carry on from childhood into adulthood, resulting in behaviours and eating patterns that reflect these perspectives. This study set out to determine whether these children are developing attitudes and perceptions about food and eating that encourage weight gain. **Methods:** Four schools in the Annapolis Valley participated in this study. A total of 91 students 49 females and 42 males, aged 9-11, completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire took 20-30 minutes for students to complete. Results were grouped together into themes and patterns. **Results:** The participants indicated that: 1) Fruits and vegetables are core components of a healthy diet, followed by “junk food” aversion and the importance of portion control, 2) Healthy Eating is important because of the relation to body weight control and the connection to health and longevity, 3) Healthy foods can taste good, particularly sweet fruits like berries, although vegetables are more unpleasant, 4) Fruits are considered the most “fun” food, whereas vegetables were consistently considered the most “boring.” **Conclusion:** Children’s attitudes toward healthy eating need to be considered a main barrier to food and vegetable intake. Improving attitudes and perception, in both the home and school environment, could possibly reduce weight gain among Nova Scotia youths.