

To investigate awareness and assess compliance of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland Dietary Guidelines for 1-5-year-olds in a Sample of Toddlers (1-3 years) who attend family resource centre facilities in Ireland

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The role of early life nutrition is well recognised especially the first 1000 days, which has a profound impact on a child's long-term health⁽¹⁾. The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) published the Scientific Recommendations for Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs) for 1–5-Year-Olds in Ireland in 2020⁽¹⁾. These guidelines promote healthy eating habits and highlight the poor intakes of iron, vitamin D and Omega-3 in preschool children. The FSAI created new recommendations to help improve the poor intakes of said nutrients, including consuming iron fortified breakfast cereals 5 times per week, red meat 3 times per week, fish once per week, and including a daily vitamin D supplement. Previously, it was found that 61% of parents were unaware of the new guidelines, with 33% aware of the new vitamin D recommendation⁽²⁾. A large proportion (73%) of preschool children did not meet the red meat recommendation and 35% did not meet the recommendation for fish⁽²⁾. However, nearly all parents (91%) believed that their toddlers had healthy diets.

This study was limited as most parents (79%) reported to have achieved 3rd level education, thus not representative of the wider population (2). The aim of this research is to investigate the awareness and compliance of the FSAI FBDGs within toddlers who attend Family Resource Centre (FRC) facilities. A 21-item questionnaire was circulated to parents of toddlers aged 1-3 who attended a FRC. The questionnaire included questions surrounding the guidelines and their toddlers' habitual dietary intakes. Descriptive statistics was performed using SPSS 27 to calculate percentages and frequencies. 23 FRCs in Ireland agreed to participate, and 65 parents were included in the analysis. 60% of the parents were 35–44 years, 43% were stay at home mothers, and 57% were of social grading C1 and C2. In the sample, 26% were aware of the new dietary recommendations and 28% were aware of the vitamin D recommendation. Overall, 75% of parents believe that their toddler has a healthy diet. However, 73% of toddlers did not meet the red meat recommendation and 31% did not meet the recommendation for fish. Less than half (45%) of parents reported giving their child a fortified breakfast cereal. 63% of participants give their toddler a supplement, with vitamin D being the most popular supplement (n = 25). In conclusion, a lack of awareness and compliance of the dietary recommendations is evident among this sample of parents with preschool children. The FBDGs emphasize the risk of insufficient intakes of certain nutrients such as iron, vitamin D and omega-3 fatty acids. Further work is needed to promote these guidelines among parents to help improve compliance and as a consequence, improve the long-term health of their children.

References

1. Food Safety Authority of Ireland (2020) Scientific Committee Report, Scientific Recommendations for Food-Based Dietary Guidelines for 1 to 5-year-olds in Ireland. [Available online at: www.fsai.ie]
2. Haydon L, et al. (2021) *Proc Nutr Soc* 80(OCE3), E117