A school meal study: comparing platewaste and likings of packed lunch and school lunch based on the New Nordic Diet - DTU Orbit (07/01/2019)

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Background and objectives: The majority of Danish children do not eat in accordance with the national dietary guidelines. The OPUS School Meal Study is a school-based intervention study testing the health effects of the New Nordic Diet (NND). The aim of this sub-study was to compare edible plate waste and self-reported likings between packed lunch from home and the served NND meal.

Methods: The OPUS School Meal study is a cluster-randomized controlled 2-period cross-over study consisting of two three-month periods: an intervention period (NND) and a control period. 187 children (8-11y) at two schools were assigned to the food waste sub-study. Edible plate waste was measured by weighing individually the meal for 5 consecutive days before and after lunch at the end of each dietary period. Self-reported smiley ratings from a web-based dietary assessment software for children were compared to edible plate waste. Data were statistical modelled in two steps, a generalised linear mixed model was fitted for the probability of waste/no waste, and secondly a model for positive waste data was fitted.

Results: 74% of all meals (N=1558) had edible plate waste (>5g). Looking at all lunches the odds for leaving edible plate waste was 11 times higher for NND than for packed lunch (P < 0.001). Looking at the meals (N=1060) with edible plate waste the amount was not significantly different between meal types; the median (IQR) for NND was 85.0 (36.5; 150.0) and the median (IQR) for packed lunch 70.0 (40.0; 119.0). Lunches rated as 'really bad' or 'bad' in the self-reported likings had more waste than lunches rated 'really good' (P < 0.001).

Conclusions: The odds of having edible plate waste were significantly higher for NND meals compared to packed lunch. Liking of school meals are a significant determinant in order to reduce edible plate waste.

General information
State: Published
Organisations: National Food Institute, Division of Nutrition, Department of Applied Mathematics and Computer Science, University of Copenhagen
Pages: 862-863
Publication date: 2013
Peer-reviewed: Yes

Publication information
Journal: Annals of Nutrition and Metabolism
Volume: 63
Issue number: Supplement 1
Article number: PO1247
ISSN (Print): 0250-6807
Ratings:
BFI (2018): BFI-level 1
Web of Science (2018): Indexed yes
BFI (2017): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2017): CiteScore 2.78 SJR 1.317 SNIP 1.057
Web of Science (2017): Impact factor 3.051
Web of Science (2017): Indexed yes
BFI (2016): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2016): CiteScore 2.69 SJR 1.215 SNIP 1.003
Web of Science (2016): Impact factor 2.424
Web of Science (2016): Indexed yes
BFI (2015): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2015): CiteScore 2.55 SJR 1.074 SNIP 1.016
Web of Science (2015): Impact factor 2.461
Web of Science (2015): Indexed yes
BFI (2014): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2014): CiteScore 2.64 SJR 1.294 SNIP 1.096
Web of Science (2014): Impact factor 2.618
BFI (2013): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2013): CiteScore 2.46 SJR 0.957 SNIP 1.036
Web of Science (2013): Impact factor 2.747
ISI indexed (2013): ISI indexed yes
Web of Science (2013): Indexed yes
BFI (2012): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2012): CiteScore 2.35 SJR 0.867 SNIP 0.89
Web of Science (2012): Impact factor 1.661
ISI indexed (2012): ISI indexed yes
BFI (2011): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2011): CiteScore 2.38 SJR 0.889 SNIP 0.95
Web of Science (2011): Impact factor 2.257
ISI indexed (2011): ISI indexed yes
Web of Science (2011): Indexed yes
BFI (2010): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2010): SJR 0.768 SNIP 0.834
Web of Science (2010): Impact factor 2.173
BFI (2009): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2009): SJR 0.688 SNIP 0.898
Web of Science (2009): Indexed yes
BFI (2008): BFI-level 2
Scopus rating (2008): SJR 0.786 SNIP 0.785
Scopus rating (2007): SJR 0.697 SNIP 0.763
Web of Science (2007): Indexed yes
Scopus rating (2006): SJR 0.709 SNIP 0.763
Scopus rating (2005): SJR 0.61 SNIP 0.776
Scopus rating (2004): SJR 0.447 SNIP 0.751
Web of Science (2004): Indexed yes
Scopus rating (2003): SJR 0.409 SNIP 0.458
Web of Science (2003): Indexed yes
Scopus rating (2002): SJR 0.415 SNIP 0.652
Scopus rating (2001): SJR 0.491 SNIP 0.607
Scopus rating (2000): SJR 0.389 SNIP 0.563
Scopus rating (1999): SJR 0.391 SNIP 0.669
Original language: English
Keywords: School intervention, Weighed plate waste method, New nordic diet, Packed lunch
Research output: Research - peer-review > Conference abstract in journal – Annual report year: 2013