

# Parental influences on child snacking

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## Valorization addendum



The main purpose of this dissertation was to gain knowledge and stimulate research, and thus, researchers were the direct target group and scientific value the main outcome. Although most studies were relatively explorative and fundamental in nature, they can also inform other professionals such as interventions developers and policy makers. This chapter discusses the value of the dissertation in a societal context and how its findings can reach the ultimate target group: parents and their children.

### **Relevance**

High intakes of energy-dense snack foods promote weight gain and obesity, according to the WHO (WHO, 2003). Obesity in childhood, in turn, is related to a variety of physical (e.g. cardiovascular diseases) and psychosocial conditions and diseases (e.g. depression) (Daniels, 2006). In addition, being obese as a child is a risk factor for being obese during adulthood (Singh et al., 2008). As a result, children's diets, including snack consumption, and overweight are topics of importance in current society: overweight has been one of the spearheads of Dutch policy for years (Rijksoverheid, 2013). However, there is a lack of empirical evidence around Dutch children's snack consumption (e.g. how much is consumed, what is consumed). Therefore, intervention programs lack clear a foundation when it comes to this health behavior.

Among the critical factors influencing children's consumption of snack foods are the behaviors of their parents, which can be classified into general parenting and parenting practices. Studies indicate that these parental behaviors are important in influencing children's dietary behavior (Sleddens et al., 2011; Gerards & Kremers, 2015). This is also recognized by the Dutch national government, since one of the three main domains in the 2014 prevention program refers to 'parenting and education' (Rijksoverheid, 2013). However, the current evidence base around food parenting practices (FPPs) has several shortcomings as indicated by the scientific conference called '*Parenting measurement: current status and consensus reports*', which was held in 2013 to boost this research area (Baranowski et al., 2013). A special issue of *Childhood Obesity* was devoted to this conference and provided several key suggestions for future research, including enhanced conceptualization of constructs and studying fathers (Baranowski et al., 2013; Hughes et al., 2013). Studies in this dissertation fully comply with these recommendations and lead to

improved understanding of parental influences around child snacking, thereby increasing the efficacy of parent-focused interventions to prevent childhood obesity.

### **Target groups, products, and innovation**

Clearly, the fundamental work carried out in this dissertation is directly relevant for researchers. For instance, the newly developed questionnaire can be used in future studies with a variety of study designs and settings. However, several findings are of importance not only to researchers, but also to policy makers, intervention developers, health care professionals, parents, and children. First of all, chapter 2 showed that the intake of energy-dense snack foods and drinks is beyond the recommendations for the vast majority of Dutch primary school aged children. This main finding is a clear signal and provides a strong basis for policy makers to draw on resources to address this dietary behavior.

Findings from the empirical studies can be translated into interventions, by which they are of importance to intervention developers and health care professionals treating overweight children. Interventions addressing children's snack intake might be improved by considering when, where and which types of foods and drinks are consumed, for instance. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 provide starting points for parent-focused interventions. These three studies were pre-eminently innovative. Rather than building on existing research paradigms, shortcomings of the current literature in the field were identified and addressed. In particular, the co-occurrence of FPPs (i.e. within and between parents) was studied while previous research applied a more isolated approach. To the best of our knowledge, only one study (O'Connor et al. 2010) has applied a cluster analysis before and few studies are available studying the interplay of FPPs between parents (e.g. Berge et al., 2010a; Berge et al., 2015). In addition, the shortage of research on (socio-cognitive) determinants of FPPs was addressed. The studies from this dissertation are thus likely to assist in improving interventions. For instance, besides mothers, fathers should be targeted in intervention programs. Dissimilarities between both parents need to be taken into account, which is relatively uncommon at present. The knowledge on factors related to the use of FPPs can be used to develop interventions according to the Intervention Mapping protocol (Bartholomew et al., 2011) by creating change objectives and specifying methods towards change. For instance, modelling and skill training might be suitable methods for increasing

parent's self-efficacy regarding FPPs. Ultimately, parents and their children are expected to benefit from those interventions and public health will improve.

### **Dissemination of study findings**

Several studies from this dissertation have been published in peer reviewed journals and presented at (inter)national conferences. In this way, researchers are able to advance this research area. For instance, in line with our suggestions, researchers used findings from the Delphi study to continue enhancing the conceptualization of FPPs (Davison et al., 2015). Two of the peer reviewed articles were also distributed through media targeting non-academics. The Delphi study was published in *VoedingNu*, a Dutch journal addressing the relation between food, nutrition and health (Gevers et al., 2014). Findings from the article on parenting congruence were published at an online community called *Yellowbrick.me* (<http://yellowbrick.me/question/being-in-sync-with-your-partner-improves-your-childs-dietary-health/>). This portal aims to transfer scientific knowledge on parenting to parents and exchange experiences between researchers and parents. As such, it's an excellent outlet for parenting research and a very convenient way to disseminate such knowledge to parents. The newly developed FPPs questionnaire was spread through a Dutch working group on parenting and children's energy balance related behaviors so that knowledge around FPPs can expand and, ultimately, children's health could improve.