

Adolescent autonomy: a key determinant in their eating behaviour

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Definitions of adolescence

- “a period of personal development during which a young person must establish a personal sense of individual **identity** and feelings of self-worth which include an alteration of his or her body image, adaptation to more mature intellectual abilities, adjustments to society’s demands for behavioural maturity, internalizing a personal value system, and preparing for adult roles”.

(Ingersoll 1989)



Determinants of adolescent eating behaviours

- Age
- Gender
- Attitudes and habits
- Schools
- Social eating
- Availability
- Peers
- Knowledge
- Money
- Social background
- Time
- Family
- Home and neighbourhood
- Media
- **Autonomy**

Definitions of autonomy

- “ a state of being independent or self-governing”

(Spear & Kulbok 2004)



Adolescents need to establish own identity

- A central issue then in adolescence is the establishment of identity, (Story & Stang 2005)
- Erikson – identity vs. role confusion



Influences of autonomy on eating behaviours

- Increased independence
 - Family → independent eating
 - Identity & rebellion → choices
 - Knowledgeable



Influences of autonomy on eating behaviours

- Increased purchasing power
 - Labour market → £££
 - + increased independence
 - Personal preferences
 - Social environments



Influences of autonomy on eating behaviours

- The meanings foods take on
 - Healthy vs. junk food
 - Symbolic meaning → identity
 - Eating patterns → exploring new roles
 - Reject traditional foods & patterns



Influences of autonomy on eating behaviours

- Control – home and away
 - Home < control but age significant
 - School
 - Policies
 - Canteen



Recommendations for practice

Health professionals → strategies → adolescents

- Research
- Unhealthy behaviour linked development
- Control via cheap & instant food – junk food
- Nutritional message packaging
- Adolescent will power significant
- Innovative strategies → promote autonomy/responsibility
- Adolescents & technological affinity
- Empower adolescents



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Thank You

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