

Design considerations in the development of a food-frequency questionnaire for school-aged children

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Background – Recent estimates of child and adolescent obesity are between 20% and 23%, with this rate continuing to increase (1). Effective prevention and treatment requires an understanding of the factors involved, including the role of dietary intake. Food frequency questionnaires (FFQs) are the most practical and economic method for assessing dietary intakes in large epidemiologic studies (2). There is currently no widely accepted FFQ for school-aged children in Australia and this gap has been acknowledged as an important area for future research (3).

Objective - To develop and pre-test a FFQ for assessing the dietary intakes of children and adolescents aged between 9 and 16 years in the Hunter Region, NSW.

Design – Focus groups were held with 61 school-aged students. Pre-testing was undertaken in another sample of 44 school-aged children and included a qualitative survey.

Outcomes – The focus group results were used to refine the food list. Subsequent pre-testing identified difficulties encountered by the children during completion of the FFQ and some small changes were made to the food list, the formatting and language of the FFQ.

Conclusion - The FFQ takes between 15 and 30 minutes to complete and is a feasible method for assessing the dietary intakes of Australian youth.

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