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Food group intakes of a representative sample of pre-school children in Ireland

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The objective of this study was to determine food and beverage intakes of Irish pre-school children using data from the National Pre-School Nutrition Survey (NPNS) (2010–2011). A 4 day weighed dietary record was used to collect food and beverage intake data from a representative sample of 500 children aged 1–4 years in Ireland. The study is described in more detail on the Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance (IUNA) website⁽¹⁾.

Mean daily food group intakes (g/d) of Irish pre-school children aged 1–4 years (total population)

	1 yr (n = 126)		2 yr (n = 124)		3 yr (n = 126)		4 yr (n = 124)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Dairy products								
Whole milk	283	228	231	223	189	169	172	148
Reduced fat milk	16	78	32	92	37	101	52	112
Infant/Growing up milk	113	200	56	137	13	63	6	46
Yoghurt and fromage frais	62	44	60	57	65	62	64	50
Cheese	8	10	9	10	8	11	10	12
Meat								
Fresh meat	7	9	11	15	12	14	15	18
Processed/leured meat	16	22	25	23	30	23	34	29
Meat dishes	43	44	38	52	32	40	33	42
Bread								
White bread	13	17	21	25	29	26	34	28
Wholemeal/brown bread	10	15	21	24	19	21	20	24
Breakfast cereals								
Ready-to-eat breakfast cereal	13	11	18	14	22	15	25	18
Other breakfast cereal	23	39	22	41	21	47	15	36
Fruit and vegetables								
Whole fruit	115	74	134	87	139	99	132	88
Fruit juices (100% fruit)	23	50	38	61	65	82	77	99
Vegetables	29	32	29	28	31	27	39	32
Beverages (excluding milk)								
Water (as a beverage)	129	146	166	207	137	133	133	142
Soft drinks (not low calorie)	21	66	49	103	52	91	77	181
Soft drinks (low calorie)	68	144	103	181	104	156	111	177
Biscuits, cakes, confectionery & savoury snacks	17	16	30	23	34	19	43	24

There is a notable change in dietary patterns with increasing age from age 1- 4 years. By age 4, dietary preferences and food habits which could lead to nutrient imbalance have emerged, such as, intake of whole milk instead of reduced fat milk, processed meats instead of fresh meat and white bread rather than brown/wholemeal. Intakes of soft drinks, fruit juices, biscuits and confectionery increased with increasing age. These findings will be useful in the development of food based dietary guidelines for pre-school children.

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1. Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance (IUNA) (2012) National Pre-School Nutrition Survey- Summary Report. Available online at www.iuna.net