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THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING ON THE CONSUMPTION OF UNHEALTHY FOODS AND BEVERAGES AMONG 1- TO 12- YEAR OLD CHILDREN IN VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

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Family functioning, which reflects how well family members communicate and interact with each other, is associated with childhood overweight and obesity, but its association with children's eating behaviours remains unclear. The aim of this study was to examine the association between family functioning and unhealthy food and beverage consumption among children ages 1 to 12 yr old. As part of the Victorian Child Health and Wellbeing study, a random sample of 4602 caregivers of children completed an interview during a single telephone interview in 2006. Caregivers reported on their child's consumption of three types of unhealthy foods and beverages and responses were recoded into weekly consumption of potato crisps and chips, monthly consumption of takeaway foods and daily consumption of sweet beverages. Family functioning included general functioning ($\alpha=0.89$) and parental psychological distress ($\alpha=0.78$). Consumption of potato crisps and chips occurred, on average, twice a week, while takeaway foods were consumed an average of three times per month. Consistently and controlling for other covariates, male caregivers had children who consumed takeaway foods more frequently and who drank more daily cups of sweet beverages. Caregiver education and living in a single-parent household were consistently associated with poorer eating habits. In all models, general family functioning and parental psychological distress were associated with poorer eating habits. In addition to traditional methods for improving diet, family-based interventions need to target more general aspects of the family's and caregiver's functioning to improve dietary intake in their communities.

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