

# American Children Snack Way More Than European Children. Why?

“Mom, can I have a snack?”

It is a question I am asked constantly by my two young children. The frequency of this question increases during the summer months. It recently got me thinking: why do children snack so often and is it damaging to their overall health? And do American children snack more than children in other countries?

Research suggests that American children do snack more than children in other countries, and that Americans are snacking more than ever.

[According to](#) Alanna Moshfegh, a research leader at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, snacking has increased steadily in recent decades, with the average number of daily eating occasions increasing from 3.9 in the late 1970s to 5.6 in 2010.

But that’s not all.

Surveys show that today 56 percent of Americans say they snack three or more times per day – and the snacking is starting at earlier ages. Food Navigator-USA [reports](#) that “almost a third (32%) of children aged 12-23 months now regularly [consume] chips, popcorn or pretzels, and 19% [are] eating candy.”

Academics [offer](#) similar claims.

“Our kids are snacking more than ever before,” says Barry Popkin, Ph.D. professor of nutrition at the University of North Carolina. “In the late 1970s, the average kid between the ages of 2 and 6 ate one snack a day between meals, but today kids typically eat almost three.”

Katja Rowell, a medical doctor and feeding specialist in St. Paul,

Minnesota, says a high frequency of snacks can have damaging consequences on a child's eating habits.

*"When kids are allowed to eat all day, it robs them of the chance to ever develop an appetite. If kids aren't coming to the table at least a little hungry, they're not as willing to try new foods."*

But how does this compare to other nations around the world?

Karen LeBillon, a Professor at the University of British Columbia, and a Rhodes Scholar with a PhD from Oxford, examined [how American children snack compared to French Children](#). What she found surprised her.

*"The first thing I learned is that French kids don't snack randomly at home. They just never think of doing it. Astounding but true. I've been going back and forth between France and Vancouver for 10 years, staying for long periods with extended family and friends, and I have never once seen a child open the fridge or cupboard and dig around for a snack, or demand a snack from their parents in between mealtimes. Not once. I kid you not."*