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# Adolescents' views of food and eating: Identifying barriers to healthy eating

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### Abstract

Contemporary Western society has encouraged an obesogenic culture of eating amongst youth. Multiple factors may influence an adolescent's susceptibility to this eating culture, and thus act as a barrier to healthy eating. Given the increasing prevalence of obesity amongst adolescents, the need to reduce these barriers has become a necessity. Twelve focus group discussions of single-sex groups of boys or girls ranging from early to-mid adolescence ( $N=73$ ) were employed to identify key perceptions of, and influences upon, healthy eating behaviour. Thematic analysis identified four key factors as barriers to healthy eating. These factors were: physical and psychological reinforcement of eating behaviour; perceptions of food and eating behaviour; perceptions of contradictory food-related social pressures; and perceptions of the concept of healthy eating itself. Overall, healthy eating as a goal in its own right is notably absent from the data and would appear to be elided by competing pressures to eat unhealthily and to lose

weight. This insight should inform the development of future food-related communications to adolescents.



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## Keywords

Adolescents; Healthy eating; Dieting; Food choice; Barriers; Eating behaviour

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