

# Kids prefer boring food

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When we dine out with our kids, they usually insist on pasta and French fries rather than the fancy and exciting dishes on the menu. New study looks into children's willingness to try out unfamiliar food.

Boys are braver than girls when it comes to trying out new things. And teenagers are less likely to challenge their taste buds than young children.

This is one of the main conclusions of a comprehensive Danish project – the 'Mass Experiment 2012' – an annual study which this year focused on children's health.

Almost 20,000 schoolchildren aged 5-19 took part in the study.

In the experiments, the children tasted 'exotic' food such as freeze-dried raspberries, honey-roasted oatmeal and dried lemon verbena.

They were then asked to fill in a questionnaire about their attitudes towards unfamiliar food.

## **Fear of unfamiliar food**

This fear of tasting new food is known in scientific circles as 'food neophobia'. It's defined as the fear of tasting new and unfamiliar food, whereas a fussy eater is one who is reluctant to eat food that's familiar, but which the person just doesn't like.

"We were a bit surprised to see that boys are more courageous eaters than girls, and that they are keener to try out new and unfamiliar food than the girls, says Helene Hausner, a postdoc at Copenhagen University's Department of Food Science.

"It also surprised us to see that teenagers were actually more anxious about tasting unfamiliar food than the youngest kids. We had expected the young children to be most reluctant to eat new and different food."

It's conceivable that a teenager's taste experience is affected by hormonal changes, and that could indicate a need for further research in this area, she adds.

"The good news is that the youngest children were keen to try new food. That means a lot for their table manners. We know for example that children need to taste food they don't like up to ten times before they learn to accept them," says Hausner.

In the study, 19,382 schoolchildren tasted 'exotic food', of which 3,994 reported their food neophobia.


## **Part of Danish Science Week**

The Mass Experiment 2012 was part of the annual Danish Science Week in September.

This year's Mass Experiment was carried out by researchers from Copenhagen and Aarhus Universities in collaboration with Research Center OPUS and Danish Science Communication.

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[Read the Danish version of this article at videnskab.dk](#) [9]

 [Kids are more likely to go for familiar food such as pasta and French fries than exotic new food. But an experiment with almost 20,000 schoolchildren suggests that boys are more likely to try out unfamiliar food than girls are. \(Photo: Colourbox\)](#) [10]

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#### Fact box

Since 2007, [Danish Science Communication](#) [12] has conducted large-scale Mass Experiments for schoolchildren as part of the annual [Danish Science Week](#) [13].

The aim is to create enthusiasm for science in children and teenagers.

Results from these Mass Experiments may not have the highest level of scientific validity, as the data is collected from little children. However, the great number of participants does indicate certain trends.

Previous Mass Experiments have examined drinking water, taste, indoor air quality, noise in the classroom, sun and skin tone – and this year's theme is the link between diet, exercise and concentration skills.

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[Mikkel Bohm, director of Danish Science Communication](#) [21]

Dann Vinther

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