



## **TAKEAWAY TOTS IN CHARGE: EXPERTS CALL FOR CLEARER GUIDANCE**

Britain's toddlers are tucking into a diet consisting mainly of takeaways and adult ready meals before they are even out of nappies. A poll\* for the *Little People's Plates* education initiative, which launches today, reveals 29% of children under three consume a takeaway at least once a week. A further 19% of toddlers are fed takeaways or adult ready meals for most meals. Whilst 23% munch crisps and 16% guzzle fizzy drinks almost every day. In spite of this, 83% of the mums polled believed their child had a healthy, balanced diet.

The findings are published in a report entitled *Food and Nutrition for the under 3s* by the Infant & Toddler Forum. The Forum has devised the *Little People's Plates* initiative to help parents feed their toddlers meals that meet their nutritional needs. This comes amidst concerns that toddlers diets are often low in key nutrients but have too much salt, saturated fat and sugar, which could lead to obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes in their future.

### **Guidance gap leads to lack of nutritional know-how for mums**

Toddlers need nutritious food for rapid growth and development in the pre-school years but the poll findings show parents are confused, simply don't understand their child's unique nutritional needs and want more information on how to feed their toddlers:

- 42% of mums say they have not received clear and consistent advice on feeding the under threes and 26% want more help from health professionals
- A quarter of parents have no idea how much salt their toddler can have each day and only 26% think the under threes should have a low salt diet
- 80% didn't know their toddler should have a low sugar diet
- 81% of mums didn't think their toddler needed carbohydrates at every meal
- Twice as many mums find their nutritional advice in the media, books and internet (34%) than via their health visitor (15%)
- Only 6% found the NHS Birth to Five book a useful source of guidance on feeding

Current government guidance suggests that children can eat 'family foods' once weaned. But if the family diet is not nutritious, then toddlers will be missing out on the nutrients they need from their meals.

### **Tots in charge**

The *Little People's Plates* poll also paints a bleak picture of toddler tea-times with mums at their wits end and tots in charge:

- 31% of mums describe routinely feeling 'angry, tense, anxious, frustrated or angry' at their toddler's mealtimes
- 48% use food to control their toddler's behaviour
- 25% pander to the whims of their toddler, making alternative meals when they refuse to eat what has been offered
- 7% of desperate mums cry or lose sleep over their child's eating habits

Professor Atul Singhal, honorary consultant paediatrician at the Institute of Child Health in London and Chair of the Infant & Toddler Forum (I&TF) commented, "Currently, there is a gap in guidance for mums of the under threes, after the weaning stage. The Infant & Toddler Forum want to help parents and are calling for a focus on these forgotten years. Early intervention is key if we are to win the fight against obesity. Focusing on health and nutrition in the early years will improve public health in the years to come by giving all children the best start in life."

Mum of two and presenter of ITV1's *Loose Women*, Andrea McLean supports the initiative: "Many foods look perfectly okay for toddlers but contain too high levels of hidden fat, salt or sugar. Knowing what's best for your child's health can be confusing for busy mums. I've learnt that we need to choose meals that have the right nutrition for toddlers, not adults, whether they are home-made or pre-prepared."

More information about *Little People's Plates* plus tips and advice on what to feed can be found at [www.littlepeoplesplates.co.uk](http://www.littlepeoplesplates.co.uk)

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## **FURTHER MEDIA INFORMATION/COLLATERAL IS AVAILABLE**

- Interviews with Andrea McLean and members of the Infant & Toddler Forum
- Expert dietitian
- Case studies
- Top tips and nutritional 'did you know's'

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### **Notes To Editor:**

#### **Little People's Plates**

Little People's Plates ([www.littlepeoplesplates.co.uk](http://www.littlepeoplesplates.co.uk)) is a new education initiative aimed at parents and carers of children from one to three years that seeks to highlight the importance of the correct nutrition this age group needs. Its objective is to provide mums with practical tips, plus evidence-based guidance to help them to make the right food choices for their toddlers whether food is home cooked or pre-prepared. Little People's Plates is driven by the Infant & Toddler Forum (I&TF), an independent team of specialists in child nutrition and development.

#### **Infant & Toddler Forum**

Set up in 2005, The Infant & Toddler Forum (I&TF) brings together a multi-disciplinary team of eight experts and practitioners who share a common professional interest in infant and child health, growth and nutrition.

The primary goal of the Forum is to improve the access of Health Care Professionals to reliable, evidence-based nutritional information relevant to their practice, so that they can advise and support the parents of infant and young children (from birth to 3 years). More information can be found at [www.infantandtoddlerforum.org](http://www.infantandtoddlerforum.org).

For the first time in 2009, the I&TF will broaden its reach to communicate directly with parents via the Little People's Plates initiative.

*The Infant & Toddler Forum and Little People's Plates are supported by an educational grant from Nutricia Ltd. The views and outputs of the Forum, however, remain independent of Nutricia and its commercial interests.*

**\* All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from OnePoll. Total sample size was 1000 mothers with a child aged 9-36 months. Fieldwork was undertaken between 6th - 13th February 2009. The poll was carried out online. The figures are unweighted.**