



Newsletter

DECEMBER 2009

We are always pleased to hear from you about your experiences with the study or your ideas for the future of the study.

Please email: growingup@abs.gov.au with any comments, or write to us (Reply Paid 66107) at the address below.

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

Conducted in partnership between the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

Growing Up in Australia

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Greetings from *Growing Up in Australia*: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children!

Many thanks to all of you for your fantastic support of the study. Here we are at the end of another exciting and productive year.

A snapshot of our year

We have now reached the fourth round of home visits. Our Australian Bureau of Statistics interviewers have already visited some families, but most of you will be contacted in 2010. The interviewers are looking forward to visiting families again and we very much hope you will take part. It's really important for us to hear from as many families as possible to give us a true picture of how Australian children are developing and how families are doing. We have some exciting new changes for the next round, which we hope will make the visit more interesting for you. So far, we are finding that families really like the changes.

Most families were sent a short questionnaire for our "between-waves" survey in June 2009. The questionnaire asked about children's media and technology use, their health, and how they travel to and from school. Also, for the younger cohort, we asked about their start at school and, for the older cohort, the help that parents give them with school and learning activities. Data from the between-waves survey will be available in June 2010.

Information from the third round of home visits was released in August 2009, enabling researchers to begin looking at how children have developed over the two years since the previous home visit. Results will start to come through in the next few months and we have included some early results in this newsletter.

It is important that the findings and insights coming from *Growing Up in Australia* reach governments, researchers and Australian families. To do this, many presentations on the study were given in the past year, in Australia and overseas. The second *Growing Up in Australia* conference was held in Melbourne in early December. The conference attracted great interest and featured presentations from Australian and international researchers.

As *Growing Up in Australia* continues on into Wave 4 and beyond, it is more important than ever that we keep in touch with you. Don't forget to let us know if any of your contact details change!



Australian Government

Australian Institute of
Family Studies

Growing Up in Australia is the longitudinal study of Australian children. It is designed to identify policy opportunities for improving support for children and their families and for early intervention and prevention strategies.

Growing Up in Australia is following representative samples of approximately 5,000 infants and 5,000 4–5 year olds and their families, from 2003–04 to at least 2018.

You can visit the *Growing Up in Australia* website at any time to find the latest information on the study. Every three months we produce a general newsletter for the website with updates on the study's progress.

www.aifs.gov.au/growingup



The Longitudinal Study of
Australian Children

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What's new in the next home visit

- You will be able to choose to do part of the interview during our initial phone call.
- Instead of filling out a paper questionnaire, we will be asking you to answer the questions on a notebook computer.
- There are no time use diaries for parents.

For children aged 6–7 years

- There will be a short interview for children. Interviewers will spend about 5 minutes asking children a few questions about school and their feelings in general. These are the same questions that were asked of the older group of children when they were aged 6–7 years.

For children aged 10–11 years

- In addition to height and weight measurements, we are taking blood pressure readings.
- As in the previous wave, children will answer questions about school, their friends, family, neighbourhoods and themselves in general. This time, they will read and answer the questions on a notebook computer with headphones to listen to the questions.

Life at 5

As you know, the *Growing Up in Australia* study has been the inspiration for the *Life at 5* documentary series, and so far two series have been produced. A third series is now in preparation, with the eleven families involved experiencing the same visits and activities as you completed in either 2004 or 2008. *Life at 5* is produced by Heiress Films, and is likely to be shown on ABC TV in the second half of 2010.

Highlights from the third round of *Growing Up in Australia* (2008)

What you thought about your neighbourhoods

Over 90% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their neighbourhoods were safe overall. However, just over 40% of parents with children aged 4–5 disagreed or strongly disagreed that their neighbourhoods were safe for children to play outside, compared to 30% of parents with children aged 8–9.

Parents' working arrangements

We were interested in how “family-friendly” the working arrangements of parents were. Answers for mothers and fathers were very similar. About half the mothers and fathers with children in both age groups (4–5 and 8–9 year olds) said they could sometimes change the time they started or finished work if necessary. Just under 30% of mothers and fathers said they could change their working hours in special situations with approval, but 16% of parents with children in both age groups said it was either “unlikely” or they “definitely wouldn't” be able to do this.

Parents' activities with children

The roles that mothers and fathers play in their children's lives in these changing times are always a matter of interest. Here we look at how parents manage everyday routines such as children's bedtime, getting ready for school (or kindergarten, preschool, child care), and sharing an evening meal with their children. Figure 1

shows how often mothers and fathers prepared their 4–5 yr old children for bed, and Figure 2 shows how often they helped them get ready for school, child care, and so on. Mothers and fathers often have different roles and responsibilities in the family, so there are some differences between the two in the graphs. First, for mothers, three-quarters prepared their child for bed or put them to bed every day, and almost a quarter did this a few times a week. Almost all of the mothers helped to get their child ready for school, preschool or child care at least a few times a week. For fathers, about a third helped their child get ready for bed or put them to bed every day, and half of the fathers did this several times a week. Quite a number of fathers also helped get their child ready for school, preschool or child care—14% every day, and 31% a few times a week.

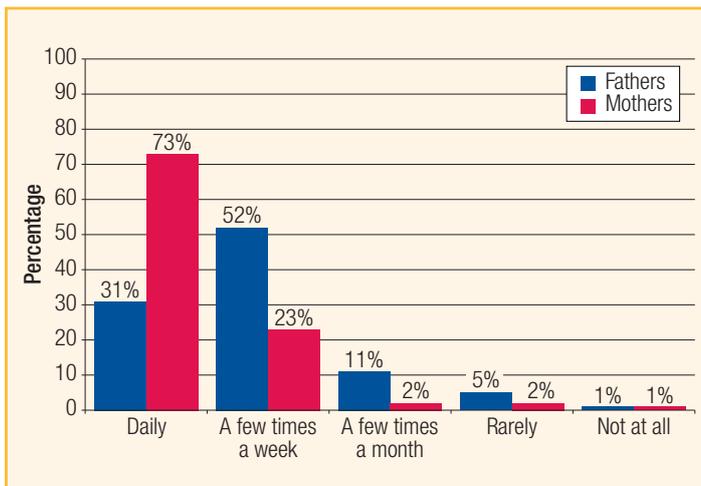


Figure 1: How often fathers and mothers put their 4–5 year old children to bed

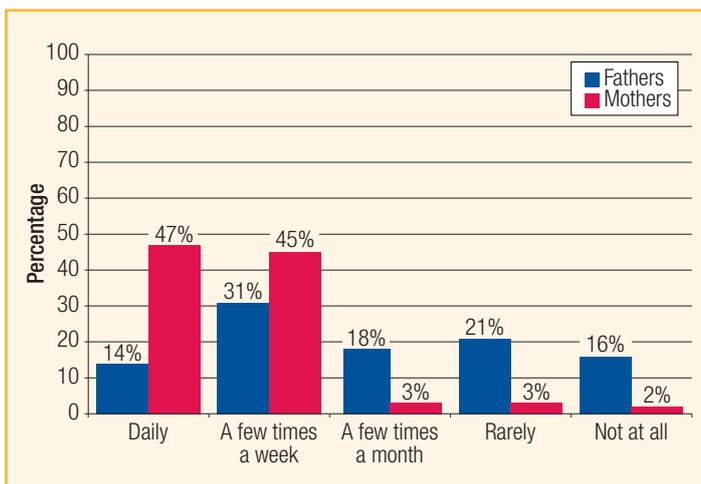


Figure 2: How often fathers and mothers helped their 4–5 year old children get ready for school, preschool or child care

We asked parents of the 8–9 year olds how often they were able to eat an evening meal with their child (shown in Figure 3 on the next page). Nearly 80% of mothers and two-thirds of fathers had their evening meal with their child every day, and 18% of mothers and 27% of fathers did so a few times a week. Very few parents reported eating with their children less frequently than this.

What the papers say

The study grows more famous every year. You may have seen some of the media attention the study received in 2009—there were over 250 radio interviews, more than 150 television appearances, almost 150 Internet postings and almost 50 newspaper articles on the *Growing Up in Australia* study. Here are some extracts of the newspaper articles.

The Australian, 2 December 2008

Growing up in Australia's 2007–08 Annual Report, to be tabled in parliament today, reveals the amount of television young children watch ranges widely. About one-third of children watch a “low” amount of TV each week, less than 4½ hours. The middle third watch between 4½ and 9 hours a week, with a third at the top end, more than 9 hours a week...

Families Minister Jenny Macklin agreed it was difficult for many families to find a balance with increased work pressures. “If we want to give children the best possible start in life, we know that the early years are absolutely vital for social and physical development,” Ms Macklin told *The Australian*. “While television has its place, it is important that kids have a balanced life including quality time with their family and physical activity.”

The Age, 30 June 2009

Babies are not missing out on cuddles if their mothers work—even full-time. They spend almost the same amount of time each day being held, read to, talked to, and cuddled as the babies of mothers who stay at home, according to a major study that charts the typical day of Australian infants. And babies who are breastfed are cuddled and talked to more but sleep for less time and cry more than non-breastfed babies.

The findings are from the *Growing Up in Australia* project, the biggest continuing study of Australian families. As part of the study, the parents of 3000 babies aged three months to 14 months kept diaries for two days on how their babies spent their time. Jennifer Baxter, a Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, said “Working mothers might spend less time with their babies but fathers are making up for it and grandparents and carers are doing the cuddling, too”.

Growing Up in Australia appears in the New York Times!

Growing Up in Australia data has attracted interest in the New York Times where it was featured in the article “Working Moms and Cuddle Time”, on 10 July 2009. The article highlighted information from a paper prepared by Institute researcher Jenny Baxter and the Australian National University’s Julie Smith, called *Breastfeeding and Infants’ Time Use*. The paper analysed the data from the Wave 1 time use diaries for infants aged 3–14 months and explored how much time infants spent in activities such as being held or cuddled, read or talked to, or crying and whether or not infants were still breastfeeding.

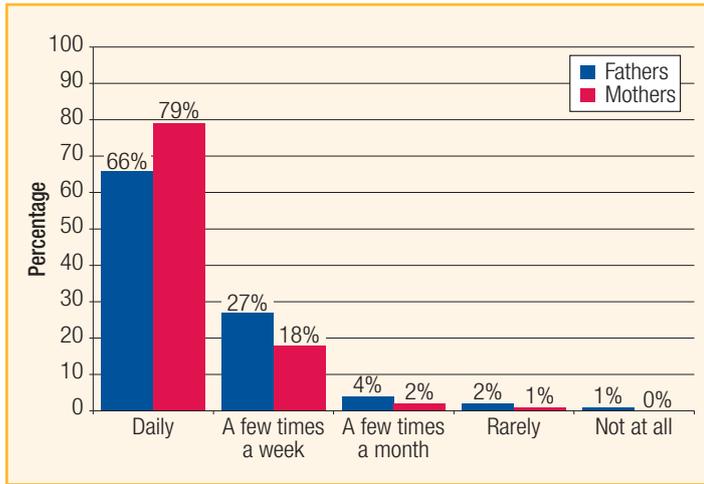


Figure 3: How often mothers and fathers of 8–9 year olds were able to eat their evening meal with the child

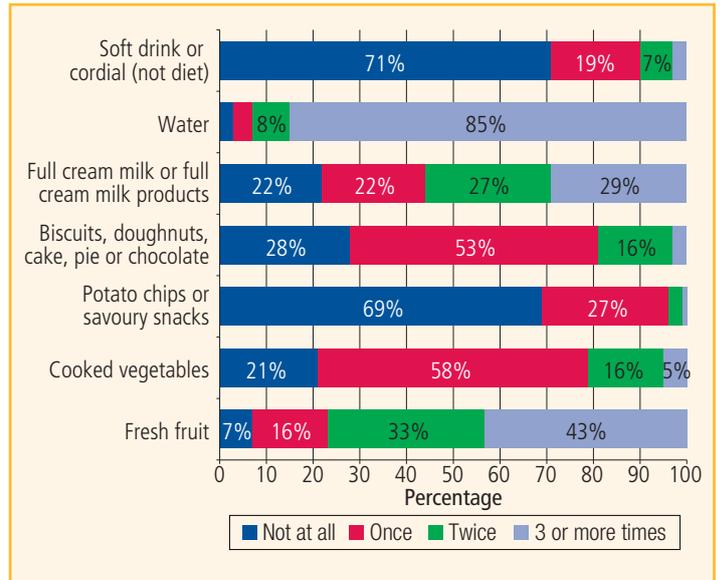
Another role for parents of school-aged children is helping with homework. Over 60% of parents (either mothers or fathers) of 8–9 year olds had helped their child with homework three or more days a week in the current school year.

Children's diet

There is much interest in the types of food children eat. Figure 4 shows how often 4–5 year olds ate particular foods or drank different types of drink on the day before their interview. About three quarters had eaten two or more pieces of fruit, and about 80% had eaten cooked vegetables. Less healthy foods were also eaten frequently: while only about 30% had eaten foods like potato chips, about 70% had eaten biscuits, cakes or similar foods. As might be expected, almost all children had drunk water, around three-quarters had drunk milk and about 30% had drunk a soft drink or cordial.

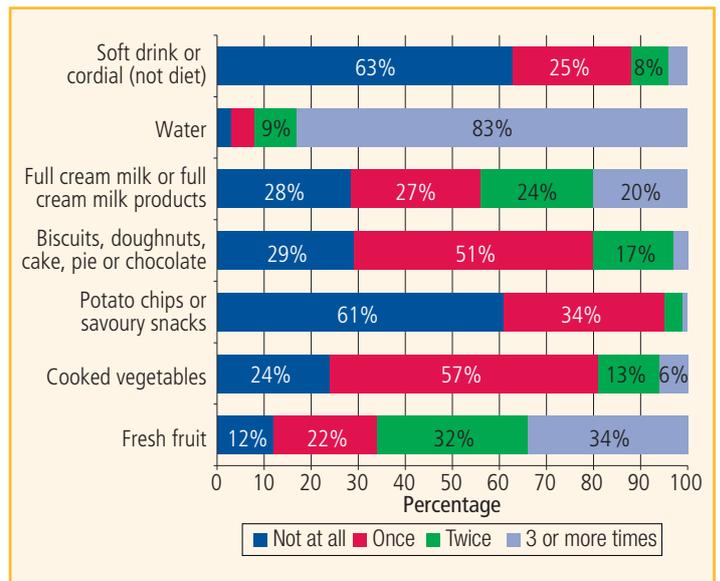
Figure 5 shows the same information for 8–9 year olds, and suggests that their diets were on average a little less healthy than for 4–5 year olds. About two-thirds had eaten two or more pieces of fruit, and three-quarters had eaten cooked vegetables. About 40% had eaten potato chips and around 70% biscuits or similar sweet foods. Again, almost all children had drunk water, around 70% had had milk or milk products, and one-third had soft drink or cordial.

These results and many others help us understand what life is like for Australian families and help the government and researchers work out how to best support you and other families. We wouldn't have this valuable information without your participation in *Growing Up in Australia*—so thank you!



Note: Values under 5% are not shown.

Figure 4: Different types of food and drink consumed by 4–5 year old children



Note: Values under 5% are not shown.

Figure 5: Different types of food and drink consumed by 8–9 year old children

Are you moving?

You are unique and irreplaceable! If you move house or change your contact details, please let us know. Please ring **1800 005 508**, email growingup@abs.gov.au or use the change of address form on the calendar.

Thank you for continuing to be part of this very important study. Only through your continued support can we obtain the best possible information for the benefit of all children.