

Topic Area: Determinants of Food Choice, Dietary Intake

Abstract Title: The effects of enhancing the appearance of food on overall recovery of children in hospitals
Gosine L¹, Morley C²
¹⁻² Acadia University, Wolfville NS

Objectives: The objective of this project was to explore how, if at all, the appearance of food can affect the recovery of hospitalized children. This project was undertaken for Senior Seminar, the capstone course for the Bachelor of Science in Nutrition.

Methods: The project involved two parts: a literature review pertaining to how food appearance impacts children's eating behaviour, and why there is a change in children's eating patterns during hospitalization, and key informant interviews. Databases used include, PEN, Acadia Library and Science Direct. The interviews were semi-structured with a pediatric nurse and a dietetic intern who is a childhood cancer survivor about their experiences with hospital food for children. The interviews augmented the limited information available from the literature research. Research was conducted in early 2017.

Results: Enhancing the appearance of food can have an effect on the recovery of children in hospital. As many children have a negative weight balance at diagnosis and cancer treatment can cause further weight loss, enhancing food appearance can increase consumption thus decreasing weight loss. When food was made appealing by manipulating shape, colour, and texture, children were more likely to eat and were happy with food being tailored to their needs. This information was gathered from eight different articles. The informant who survived childhood cancer stated that food appearance had an enormous impact on what she ate. If the food did not appear familiar, she was less likely to eat it. The interviews revealed children's hospitals do try to make food appear more appealing.

Conclusion: Children rely on the appearance of food when deciding what to eat. Manipulating food appearance is associated with increased intake. Further research would involve investigation of how more visually-appealing food can be produced for hospitalized patients.

Significance to the field of Dietetics: Understanding how the appearance of food impacts a person's intake and recovery is important to consider when planning hospital meals, not only for children.