

## HBSC IRELAND

The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) is a research study conducted by an international network of research teams<sup>1</sup> in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (Europe) and co-ordinated by Dr Joanna Inchley of the University of Glasgow. This factsheet is based on data collected in 2018 from 12,002 10-17 year olds in Ireland from randomly selected schools throughout the country<sup>2</sup>.

Further information is available at:  
<http://www.hbsc.org>  
<http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc/>



**hbsc**  
HEALTH BEHAVIOUR IN  
SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN  
ÉIREANN/IRELAND



## Summary

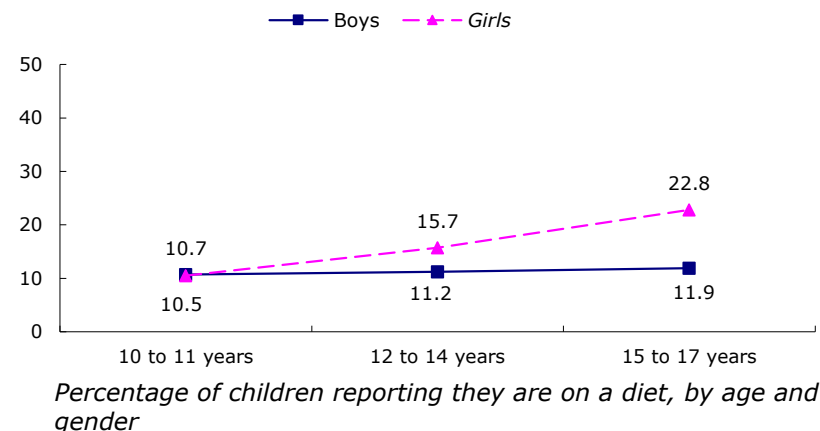
DiETING in this factsheet refers to children who report that they are on a diet or doing something to lose weight at present. Overall, 14.5% of children reported that they are trying to lose weight, as compared to 16.2% in 2014. Among girls, 17.3% report trying to lose weight, compared to 11.3% of boys. Older children are more likely to report dieting behaviour than younger children (10.6% of 10–11-year-olds, 13.6% of 12–14-year-olds, and 17.8% of 15–17-year-olds). Children in lower social classes, those who feel pressured by their schoolwork, and those who spend four or more evenings with friends are more likely to report dieting. Children who find it easy to talk to their parents, those who like school, and those who live with both parents are less likely to report dieting.

## Why this topic?

It is common for children who are overweight, or healthy-weight children who are dissatisfied with their bodies<sup>3,4</sup>, to engage in behaviours to reduce weight<sup>4</sup>. However, dieting in childhood and adolescence is a predictor of weight gain and obesity in later life<sup>5</sup>. Dieting and disordered eating behaviours are also associated with self-reported poor health and well-being<sup>3</sup>, poor dietary quality<sup>6</sup>, and negative impacts on both physical<sup>4</sup> and mental health<sup>7</sup>.

## Change 2014-2018

The proportion of children who report dieting or other activities to lose weight has decreased slightly from 2014 (16.2%) to 2018 (14.5%). This overall decrease is driven by a significant decrease in dieting for girls (21.1% in 2014, 17.3% in 2018). Rates have increased slightly for boys (from 10.9% in 2014 to 11.3% in 2018). Boys are reporting dieting behaviour at a younger age than in 2014. In 2014, the rate of dieting among 15–17-year-old boys was 12.2%; this decreased to 11.9% in 2018 but was offset by an increase in dieting among 12–14-year-old boys (from 10.6% in 2014 to 11.2% in 2018).

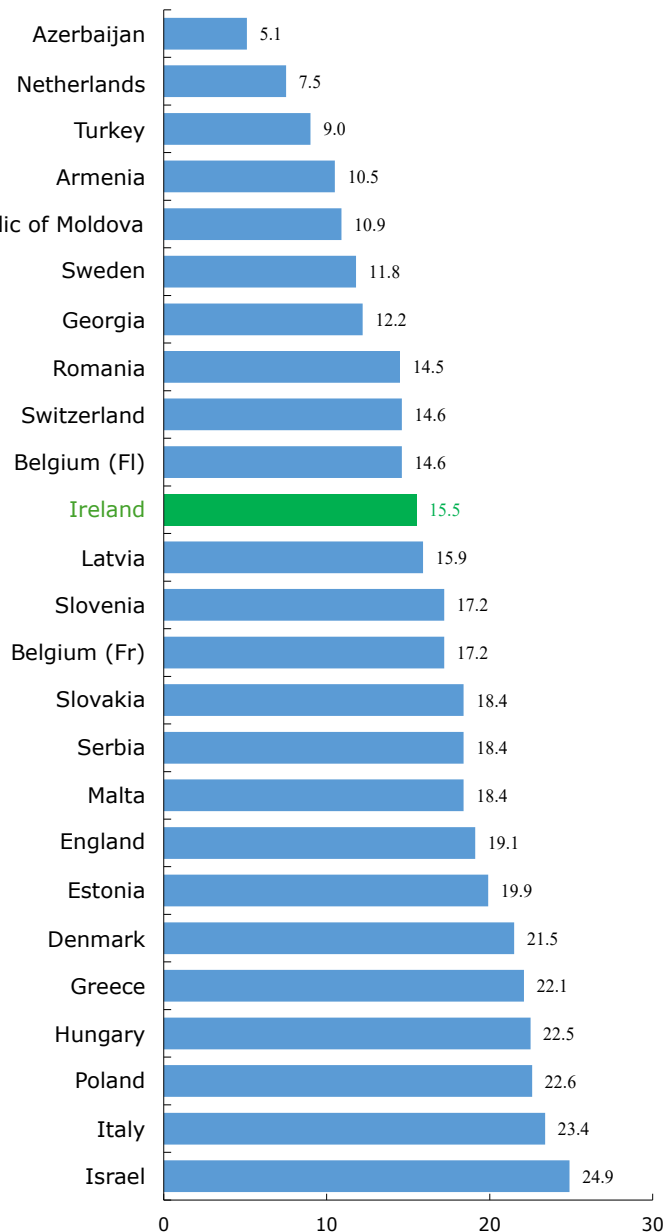


## DiETING behaviour in context

- Children in lower social class groups are more likely to report being on a diet than those from higher social class groups (17.5% in social class 5-6; 14.6% in social class 3-4; 14.0% in social class 1-2)
- Children who live with both parents are less likely to report being on a diet compared to children who live in other types of households (13.7% vs. 16.7%)
- Children who report that they find it easy to talk to their mother are less likely to report being on a diet (13.5% vs. 19.7%) compared to those who do not find it easy. The same pattern holds for ease of talking to their father (12.7% vs. 17.7%)
- Children who report spending four or more evenings out with friends per week are more likely to report being on a diet than those who do not spend as many evenings out with friends (15.8% vs. 14.0%)
- Children who report liking school are less likely to report being on a diet compared to those who do not (13.1% vs. 17.7%), while those who report feeling pressured by school work are more likely to report being on a diet compared to those who do not feel pressured (17.9% vs. 11.9%).

## ...DiETING behaviour among schoolchildren in Ireland

Percentage of 15 year children reporting they are on a diet, by country



### International

Fifteen year old schoolchildren in Ireland (boys and girls together) are ranked 15th among 25 countries in Europe with 15.5% reporting that they are currently on a diet<sup>1</sup>.

### Implications

The proportion of children who report dieting has reduced slightly since 2014. For 15-year-olds, Ireland ranks in 15th position of the 25 European and North American countries who took part in HBSC 2018. The findings suggest that having a good relationship with parents, and enjoying school, may have a protective effect against dieting behaviour. Given the potential negative effects of dieting in children, it is important to promote and enable healthy eating habits and to promote body positivity.

### References

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All factsheets and other HBSC publications and reports can be downloaded from our website: <http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbcs>

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