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Food neophobia and pickiness in young children. How to measure it?

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Abstract

Background. The two strongest barriers to increasing children's dietary variety and consumption of fruit and vegetables are food neophobia and pickiness, assumed to be the main kinds of food rejection in children. Accordingly, psychometric tools that provide a clear assessment of food neophobia and pickiness are greatly needed.

Objective. We developed and validated a new scale for the assessment of food neophobia and pickiness, thus filling a major gap in the psychometric assessment of food rejection by French children. We concentrated on French children aged 2-7 years, as no such scale exists for this young population, and on the two known dimensions of food rejection, namely food neophobia and pickiness, as the nature of the relationship between them is still unclear.

Design. The questionnaire was administered online to two samples (N1=168; N2=256) of caregivers who responded for their children aged between 2 and 7 years. Additionally, a food choice task was administered to 17 children to check the scale's predictive validity.

Main outcome measures/Statistical analysis performed. A factor analysis was performed to investigate the underlying structure of the scale. Internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and convergent discriminant and predictive validity were also assessed.

Results. The resulting scale, called the Child Food Rejection Scale (CFRS), included six items relating to food neophobia and five items relating to pickiness. The factor analysis confirmed the two-dimensional structure of the scale. Internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and convergent and discriminant validity were all satisfactory. Moreover, results from the food choice task showed that scores on the CFRS accurately predicted children's attitudes toward new and familiar foods.

Conclusions. Taken together, these findings suggest that the CFRS, a short and easy-to-administer scale, represents a valuable tool for studying food rejection tendencies in French children.

Key-words: Questionnaire development, Children, Food neophobia, Food pickiness, Reliability, Validity

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