

Data Collection Method Brief

Collecting Data from Children Ages 9-13

APPENDIX A: DIARIES

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<http://www.lpfch.org/informed/facts/etr.html>

Diaries

How have diaries been used for collecting information from children?

Researchers and practitioners use diaries to collect health information from children so they can better understand their daily lives. The research on using diaries with children suggests that children ages 7 and older can use this method to document their health-related experiences (e.g., hypoglycemia, headaches, recreational injuries). This method generally involves having children report information on a set interval (e.g., daily) using a paper-pencil diary or another format (e.g., telephone or electronic diaries).

What are important considerations when using diaries with children?

- ✓ Diary formats can vary widely and often include ratings and open-ended questions.
- ✓ The age and cognitive ability of children affect their ability to fill out diaries. Children under age 11 can learn classification as well as time relationships, but may be challenged by important concepts in diaries such as duration (e.g., length of symptoms). Parents may need to help younger children in filling out diaries.
- ✓ Children's level of interest and motivation to fill out diaries affects the success of using this method.
- ✓ Using novel formats (e.g., electronic diaries) may enhance the appeal of this mode of data collection.

What are the advantages of using this approach?

- In-depth information
- Cost

What the Research Says...

- ✓ Children 7-11 years old were found to have a *good* ability to self-report intensity and frequency (of headaches); children 12 and older found to have an *excellent* ability to self-report on these factors.¹
- ✓ The process of recording daily events often produced better data compared to in-person interviews where children tried to recall information that happened in the past.^{2,4}
- ✓ Children often include more detailed information (e.g., facial expressions that correlated with absence or presence of pain) in their diaries; this adds to the depth of information obtained.³
- ✓ Diaries can be a relatively low cost way to collect information from children if they are distributed and collected directly rather than mailed.³

What are the drawbacks of this approach?

- Preparation
- Response rate
- Data quality
- Data management

What the Research Says...

- ✓ Children need a lot of preparation and training to make sure they know how to complete the diary.^{1,3}
- ✓ The dropout rate is often high in diary studies, which may be because of children's lack of interest and boredom with having to record entries too often or for too long.³
- ✓ It is difficult to verify if the diary is being completed as requested, and if it is only being completed by the children and not their parents.³
- ✓ Evidence of the validity and reliability of the diary is limited and conflicting; some evidence suggests diary reports are consistent with data collected via interviews, but other studies suggest that diaries are less prone to social desirability than interview-administered surveys.^{3,4}
- ✓ When analyzing data it is difficult to determine if data are missing.³
- ✓ Data analysis of diaries requires detailed coding prior to analysis.³

References

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