Telling children to clean their plate may save in food wastes, but it could potentially cause obesity issues in the future.

Are children affected by the ‘clean-your-plate’ reminders?

63 Preschoolers’ primary meal providers were asked to survey how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement, “I tell my child to clean their plate.”

The children were randomly given a 16 or 32 oz cereal bowl and asked to indicate how much they would eat of fruit loops for a morning snack. The portion the child indicated was given to them and weighed.

Findings

- Boys and girls requested the **same amount** of cereal when given the same bowl.

- Children requested **twice** as much cereal when given the larger bowl than when given the smaller bowl.

- The amount of cereal eaten by a child was **unrelated to their BMI**.

- The correlation between children being told to clean their plate and the amount of cereal they requested was high. There was a **statistically significant** correlation for boys, but not girls.

“Clean-your-plate” mentality translates between home and school

Children who requested larger portions of food at school were more likely to request larger portions at home.

This correlation was stronger with boys than with girls.

Wansink, Brian and Collin R. Payne (2008), “Consequences of Belonging to the ‘Clean Plate Club,’” Archives of Adolescent and Pediatric Medicine, 162:10 (October), 994-996.
Avoiding the clean-your-plate mentality

• If your child is facing potential obesity issues, the clean-your-plate reminder at dinner may lead to unwanted consequences.
• Encourage children to eat a variety of food offered at the table.
• Provide children with moderate portions and smaller bowls.

More on this study, and other Food and Brand lab projects:
http://www.foodpsychology.cornell.edu/
http://mindlesseating.org/
http://www.athensacademy.org/academics/preschool/index.phpb