

# The Effects of Parents' Perceptions of Food on Children's Eating Habits Later in Life

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## Abstract

**Background:** Much of the research associated with eating patterns of adolescents or young adults has been related to genetics, weight gain associated with parental influence of food selection, and children's food choices relative to their parents' desires. There is little research conducted on children's perceptions of their parent's food choices and how those beliefs correlate to their own dietary choices later in life.

**Methods:** An online survey was developed that consisted of questions regarding student's perceptions of their parents' dietary choices and their own current dietary choices and beliefs. Researchers recruited participants via email and social media. Data was analyzed using SPSS.

**Results:** Among survey participants (N=158) there was a significant correlation ( $p \leq 0.01$ ) between the parent's past eating behaviors and child's current eating behaviors for several dietary patterns, including vegan, low carbohydrate, calorie counting and gluten free. Approximately 42% (n=66) of respondents reported that they were made aware of their weight at a young age. There was a strong correlation ( $p \leq 0.01$ ) between parents discussing weight and discouraging attempts to try new foods.

**Conclusions:** There was a significant correlation between the way that children view diet and nutrition and how their parents view diet and nutrition, as perceived by the children. Parents' specific eating behaviors and discussions about weight also correlate with their children's current eating behaviors and awareness of weight, although they may not currently live together. For more conclusive results, future research on the subject should also include data regarding parents' perspective of their own food choices and beliefs.

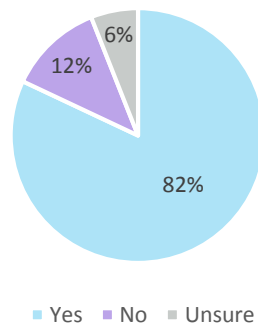
## Background

Much of the research associated with eating patterns of adolescents or young adults has been related to genetics, weight gain associated with parental influence of food selection, and children's food choices relative to their parents' desires. Previous research also concludes that since most children are not kept in isolation when they eat, who they are surrounded by, and their environment, play a large role in their eating behaviors. Research conducted relates family meal time and the Socio-Ecological Model to children's attitudes and beliefs towards food as they grow up. However, there is little research conducted on children's perceptions of their parents' food choices and how those beliefs correlate to their own dietary choices later in life.

## Methods

An online survey was developed, via Survey Monkey, that consisted of questions regarding student's perceptions of their parents' dietary choices and their own current dietary choices and beliefs. The study was approved by Texas Christian University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Researchers recruited college students age 18-24 via email and social media, after which the participants responded to the 28-question survey. To ensure confidentiality, completed surveys were assigned a number with no identifying markers included other than age and gender. Once the target sample of >150 participants was met, data was analyzed using SPSS.

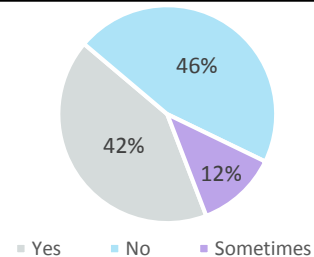
## Belief That Children's Food Preferences Are Related to Their Parent's Preferences



## Results

Among survey participants (N=158) there was a significant correlation ( $p \leq 0.01$ ) between the parents' past eating behaviors and children's current eating behaviors for several dietary patterns, including vegan, low carbohydrate, calorie counting and gluten free. Approximately 42% (n=66) of respondents reported that they were made aware of their weight at a young age. There was a strong correlation ( $p \leq 0.01$ ) between parents discussing weight and discouraging attempts to try new foods. Approximately 80% (n=126) of respondents believe that children's food preferences are related to their parents'/ caregivers' preferences.

## Children Made Aware of Weight at a Young Age



## Discussion and Conclusions

There was a significant correlation between the way that children view diet and nutrition and how their parents view diet and nutrition, as perceived by the children. Parents' specific eating behaviors and discussions about weight correlate with their children's current eating behaviors and awareness of weight, although they may not currently live together. This finding was significant for those following a vegan, low carbohydrate, calorie counting and gluten free diet. There has been a recent resurgence in the popularity of low carbohydrate diets which may explain why a large number of 18-24 year olds are currently following this dietary pattern, just as the respondents reported that a large number of their parents followed that diet in the past. For more conclusive results, future research on the subject should also include data regarding the parents' perspective of their own food choices and beliefs, as well as the relationship between their food choices and timeline of popular dietary trends.

## Similarities in Dietary Patterns Between Children and Parents

