

# Eating habits and exercise behaviors in children can deteriorate early

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As children transition from preschool-age to school-age, they may develop eating habits and leisure-time patterns that may not meet current recommendations and may contribute to childhood obesity. In a study published in the January/February 2009 issue of the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, researchers report that parents perceived that their pre-school children (2 to 5 years) had relatively good eating habits and physical activity levels, but that parents of school-aged children (6 to 12 years) felt their children had less healthful diets and leisure-time activities.

Surveying the mothers of 174 children aged 2 to 12, investigators from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and Brown University Medical School determined the parent's age, height and weight. The eating and leisure-time activity questionnaire was completed by the parent, and the child's height and weight were obtained from the child's medical record.

Parents of older children report greater consumption of sweetened drinks instead of low-fat dairy drinks, as well as higher consumption of salty and sweet snacks. Older children also tended to eat dinner with parents less often, which can contribute to less healthy food choices.

A greater percentage of parents with younger children rated their child as "just as" or "a little more" active than their peers as compared to the percentage of parents with older children. Additionally, parents reported that the older children watched significantly more hours of TV on weekend days than the younger children. Taken together, these findings suggest that parent reporting of behaviors commonly believed to promote childhood obesity increases with older children.

Writing in the article, Dr. Hollie A. Raynor, Department of Nutrition, University of Tennessee,

Knoxville, states, "Although preschool-aged children engaged in more healthful behaviors according to parent recall, the preschool-aged children only met 2 dietary recommendations, fruit and low-fat dairy intake. All other parent-reported eating and leisure-time activity patterns did not meet current recommendations. Surprisingly, other than fast-food consumption, this study found few parent-reported eating and leisure-time behaviors related to weight status, which may be a consequence of the overall poor diet quality and relative inactivity reported in this diverse sample.

Thus, interventions designed to help children meet dietary and leisure-time activity recommendations should begin by assisting parents with preschool-aged children in developing skills to provide the structure and the environment necessary for their young children to develop healthful lifestyles."

Source: Elsevier

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