

Certain behavioral traits and feeding practices may increase risk for weight gain in children

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Many clinicians and public health officials view parental involvement as an essential part of solving the current childhood obesity epidemic. However, it's important for parents to use the right approach when trying to combat childhood obesity. Restrictive feeding practices, or forbidding certain foods, may not always be the best solution. A child's inhibitory control, a behavior similar to self-control, may be more important than parental restrictions. An article and related editorial soon to be published in *The Journal of Pediatrics*, explore the relationship between a child's low inhibitory control, parental restrictive feeding practices, and childhood weight gain.

Stephanie Anzman, MS, and Leann Birch, PhD, of the Center for [Childhood Obesity](#) Research at Pennsylvania State University studied 197 non-Hispanic white girls. They collected information from the girls and their parents over a 10-year period, beginning when the girls were 5 years old. In addition to recording their [body mass index](#) (BMI), the researchers asked the girls whether their parents restricted or forbade certain foods. The researchers also recorded the parents' [BMI](#), income, and [education level](#). Additionally, mothers were asked to describe their child's level of self-control.

Anzman and Birch found that girls with lower self-control had higher BMIs and gained more weight than those girls who demonstrated better self-regulation. Girls with lower self-control were almost twice as likely

to be overweight by the age of 15. The authors also noticed a relationship between a child's perception of parental restrictive feeding practices and weight gain. In other words, the combination of high parental restriction and low self-control put girls at the highest risk for weight gain among the group studied.

According to Ms. Anzman, "Parental attempts to help children with lower self-control by restricting their access to favorite snack foods can make the forbidden foods more attractive, thereby exacerbating the problem." She suggests that parents can help their children learn to control their eating habits by allowing them to choose between healthy options. She adds that it is often better to not keep restricted foods in the house. "That way," she explains, "it is not necessary to constantly tell children they cannot have the foods they want."

In a related editorial, Nancy F. Krebs, MD, MS, and Susan L. Johnson, PhD, of the University of Colorado point out that it is unclear how these findings might apply to boys because the researchers only studied girls. Drs. Krebs and Johnson view this as an opportunity for future studies to explore the relationship between low self-control, parental restrictions, and weight gain among a more diverse group of children and families. According to Dr. Krebs, "The implications of this study can be considered in both the clinical and public health arenas."

More information: The study, reported in "Low Inhibitory Control and Restrictive Feeding Practices Predict Weight Outcomes" by Stephanie L. Anzman, MS, and Leann L. Birch, PhD, [DOI: 10.1016/j.jpeds.2009.04.052](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2009.04.052) and related editorial, "Internal vs External Influences on Energy Intake: Are Disinhibited Eat[DOI: 10.1016/j.jpeds.2009.06.041](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2009.06.041). Johnson, PhD, and Nancy F. Krebs, MD, MS, DOI: 10.1016/j.jpeds.2009.06.041 appear in *The Journal of Pediatrics*.

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