

# Work conditions impact parents' food choices

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Since most parents in the US are employed, there are competing demands on their time that can compromise food choices for themselves and their children. How parents cope with these demands and how work conditions are related to food choice coping strategies are the subjects of a study in the September/October issue of the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*. Findings suggest that better work conditions may be associated with more positive strategies such as more home-prepared meals, eating with the family, keeping healthful food at work, and less meal skipping.

Researchers from Cornell University measured food choice coping strategies in low- to middle-income families in five categories: (1) food prepared at/away from home; (2) missing meals; (3) individualizing meals (family eats differently, separately, or together); (4) speeding up to save time; and (5) planning. A three-part telephone survey of 25 employed mothers and 25 employed fathers or guardians from 3 racial/ethnic groups was used to evaluate food choice strategies.

Half or more of respondents often/sometimes used 12 of 22 food choice coping strategies and there were [gender differences](#) in the use of these strategies. Fathers who worked long hours or had nonstandard hours and schedules were more likely to use take-out meals, miss family meals, purchase prepared entrees, and eat while working. Mothers purchased restaurant meals or prepared entrees or missed breakfast. Job security, satisfaction, and food access were also associated with gender-specific strategies. About a quarter of mothers and fathers said they did not have

access to healthful, reasonably priced, and/or good-tasting food at or near work.

Writing in the article, Carol M. Devine, PhD, RD, Division of Nutritional Sciences, Cornell University, and colleagues state, "This study examined how work conditions are related to the food choice coping strategies of low- and moderate-income parents. Study findings will enhance understanding of social and temporal employment constraints on adults' food choices and may inform workplace interventions and policies... The importance of work structure for employed parents' food choice strategies is seen in the associations between work hours and schedule and food choice coping strategies, such as meals away from home and missed family meals. Long work hours and irregular schedules mean more time away from family, less time for household food work, difficulty in maintaining a regular meal pattern, and less opportunity to participate in family meals; this situation may result in feelings of time scarcity, fatigue, and strain that leave parents with less personal energy for food and meals."

More information: The article is "Work Conditions and the [Food Choice Coping Strategies of Employed Parents](#)" by Carol M. Devine, PhD, RD; Tracy J. Farrell, MS; Christine E. Blake, PhD, RD; Margaret Jastran, RD; Elaine Wethington, PhD; and Carole A. Bisogni, PhD. It appears in the *Journal of [Nutrition Education and Behavior](#)*, Volume 41, Issue 5 (September/October 2009) published by Elsevier.

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