

# Children of working mothers less healthy: study

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Image: Wikimedia Commons.

(PhysOrg.com) -- A new British study has found that the children of working mothers are less likely to eat right and exercise than children of mothers who stay home.

The U.K. Millenium Cohort Study analyzed data on 12,576 singleton [children](#) aged nine months to five years old. The study found children whose mothers worked were more likely to have unhealthy habits such as snacking on potato chips and consuming sweet drinks, and they were less likely to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables and get proper exercise. The results were similar for mothers who worked part time and full time, and were not related to factors such as the mother's [education level](#) or ethnicity.

According to the paper, published in the [Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health](#), time constraints may limit the capacity of parents to provide healthy foods and encourage their children to exercise. The authors, Summer Sherburne Hawkins, Tim J Cole, and Catherine Law, said the research was intended to underscore the need for a review of the policies in effect and the training given to child carers. It was not intended to add guilt to that already felt by many working mothers.

The research did not specify the kind of care the children were given while their mothers were at work, and it did not look at the effects of whether fathers worked or not. The authors said they excluded fathers because their patterns of work have changed little in the last few decades.

An estimated 60% of women in the U.S. and U.K. now work after having children, according to the Institute of Child Health in the U.K. Many of these women say they have little or no choice in whether to work or not.

The research also found many of the children had unhealthy habits such as drinking sodas (41%), snacking on potato chips (37%), and spending more than two hours a day [watching TV](#) or using a computer (61%), regardless of whether or not their mothers worked. This suggests it is not only working [mothers](#) who need some help.

More information: Examining the relationship between maternal employment and health behaviours in 5-year-old British children, *J Epidemiol Community Health*. Published Online First: 29 September 2009. [doi:10.1136/jech.2008.084590](https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2008.084590)

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