

Food fight or romantic dinner? Communication between couples is key to improving men's diets

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Married men will eat their peas to keep the peace, but many aren't happy about it, and may even binge on unhealthy foods away from home.

"The key to [married men](#) adopting a healthier diet is for couples to discuss and negotiate the new, healthier menu changes as a team," said Derek Griffith, assistant professor at the University of Michigan School of Public Health.

This seems obvious, but most times it doesn't happen, according to a new study called "'She looks out for the meals, period.' African-American men's perceptions of how their wives influence their eating behavior and dietary health."

Researchers conducted focus groups with 83 African-American men. The majority of men said their wives didn't consult them when helping them to adopt a healthier diet. Even though the healthier diet was often ordered by a physician, the husbands often disliked the food changes, but to avoid conflict, they didn't object. Men focused more on maintaining a happy home than having a say in what they ate.

In fact, the only examples found of couples negotiating [healthy food choices](#) came about to benefit the children in the home, Griffith said.

However, without that communication, those good intentions and [healthy](#)

[diet](#) changes often backfired, the study found. After tasteless [ground turkey](#) for the fifth night in a row, some men would head to the all-you-can-eat buffet for "a landslide of food."

"I think at dinner a lot of men are eating healthier, but they compensate for the [dissatisfaction](#) of not eating what they want by making unhealthier choices outside the home," Griffith said.

Physicians can help by recognizing that wives play a central role in what men eat at home, Griffith said.

"Doctors could suggest that men have a tactful conversation with their wives in a way that ensures the husbands aren't sleeping on the couch that night," Griffith said.

More information: Study abstract in *Health Psychology*:
psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/2012-12108-001

Provided by University of Michigan

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