

Working moms spend less time daily on kids' diet, exercise, study finds

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When it comes to cooking, grocery shopping and playing with children, American moms with full-time jobs spend roughly three-and-half fewer hours per day on these and other chores related to their children's diet and exercise compared to stay-at-home and unemployed mothers, reports a new paper by a Cornell University health economist.

[Male partners](#) do little to make up the deficit: Employed fathers devote just 13 minutes daily to such activities and non-working fathers contribute 41 minutes, finds the study, which will be printed in the December issue of *Economics and Human Biology* and is posted online at <http://bit.ly/NxDohy>

The findings are consistent across socio-economic lines measured by the mothers' education, family income, race and ethnicity.

To make up for this time deficit, working mothers are significantly more likely to spend time purchasing prepared foods – takeout from restaurants or prepackaged, ready-to-eat meals from grocery stores – which are generally less nutritious than home-cooked meals.

"It's inaccurate to pin rising childhood [obesity rates](#) on women, given that husbands pick up so little of the slack," cautioned lead author John Cawley, professor of policy analysis and management and of economics at Cornell's College of [Human Ecology](#).

The study does not prove that employment alone drives the way mothers

spends their time. "For example, mothers who choose to work might be those who enjoy cooking less and who would cook less whether working or not," Cawley said.

He added that [working mothers](#) produce additional benefits for children such as more money to provide for family needs.

"It's important to remember that we can take steps to enhance childhood nutrition and physical activity without advocating that women exit the workforce," Cawley said. For instance, the authors argue, parents should be better educated about the [nutritional content](#) of restaurant and prepackaged foods. "In order to make more informed decisions, consumers need to have nutrition and calorie information available where they buy their food," said Cawley, who noted that federal health care reform rules will soon require chain and fast-food restaurants nationwide to post calorie counts of the foods they sell.

Cawley noted that schools shoulder a greater burden for supporting healthy lifestyles.

"Our findings underscore the importance of schools offering high-quality foods and physical education classes," he said. "In general, the Institute of Medicine and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are urging comprehensive changes in school environments to promote healthy eating and active living."

Provided by Cornell University

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