

Better-educated parents feed children fewer fats and less sugar

March 27 2013



The level of education of parents has an influence on the frequency with which their children eat foods linked to obesity. The children of parents with low and medium levels of education eat fewer vegetables and fruit and more processed products and sweet drinks. Credit: IDEFICS

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An international group of experts from eight European countries have analysed the relation between parents' levels of education and the frequency with which their children eat food linked to overweight.

The Identification and prevention of dietary- and lifestyle-induced [health effects](#) in children and infants (IDEFICS) study includes data from 14,426 children aged between two and nine from eight European countries: Italy, Estonia, Cyprus, Belgium, Sweden, Hungary, Germany and Spain.

The results published in the journal *Public Health Nutrition* confirm that parents with a lower level of education feed their children food rich in sugars and fats more often than those parents with a higher level of education, who feed their children more products of a higher [nutritional quality](#), including vegetables, fruit, pasta, rice and wholemeal bread.

"The greatest differences among families with different levels of education are observed in the consumption of fruit, vegetables and [sweet drinks](#)", explains Juan Miguel Fernández Alvira, the author of the work and researcher from the University of Zaragoza to SINC.

For the authors, this implies a greater risk of developing [overweight and obesity](#) in children from less advantaged socio-cultural groups.

"The programmes for the prevention of childhood obesity through the promotion of [healthy eating habits](#) should specifically tackle less advantaged social and [economic groups](#), in order to minimise inequalities in health", concludes Fernández Alvira.

Childhood nutrition

Childhood, from two to fourteen years old, is a growth period during which the requirements for energy and nutrients increase. Nevertheless, the [World Health Organisation](#) warns of the importance of monitoring the diet of the youngest members of society, as almost 40 million children under the age of five suffered from overweight in 2010.

In fact, recommendations for children over two do not differ greatly from those for adults. Their diet should include cereals, fruit, vegetables, dairy products, lean meats, fish, poultry, eggs and nuts.

Dieticians and nutritionists recommend that parents offer children a wide variety of foods and avoid using food as a method to award or punish behaviour. Experts believe that this age group can decide how much to eat, provided the food is always healthy and nutritious.

More information: Juan Miguel Fernández-Alvira, Theodora Mouratidou, Karin Bammann, Antje Hebestreit, Gianvincenzo Barba, Sabina Sieri, Lucia Reisch, Gabriele Eiben, Charalampos Hadjigeorgiou, Eva Kovacs, Inge Huybrechts y Luis A Moreno. IDEFICS Consortium. "Parental education and frequency of food consumption in European children: the IDEFICS study". *Public Health Nutrition*: 16(3), marzo de 2013: 487 [doi:10.1017/S136898001200290X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S136898001200290X)

Provided by Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT)

Citation: Better-educated parents feed children fewer fats and less sugar (2013, March 27) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-03-better-educated-parents-children-fats-sugar.html>

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