

Diet quality links old and young

December 18 2013



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Understanding how dietary habits are connected through the generations could have valuable benefits for community health, a new study shows.

The Taiwanese study assessed the relationship between the quality of [children](#)'s diets and that of their elders in a wide range of representative communities, generating findings that have international relevance.

Led by Emeritus Professor Mark Wahlqvist from Monash University's Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine and the Monash Asia Institute, the research used national survey information on [health](#) and nutrition for more than 2400 students aged from six to 13, and nearly 1800 elderly people.

"The groups of children who scored highest on dietary quality showed a correlation with high dietary scores among their respective elders," Professor Wahlqvist said.

This was seen within the context of a range of factors that were shown to influence the quality of children's diets.

"Factors from level of household income and parental education to the amount of time children spend watching television were all found to be significant determinants of dietary quality in children," Professor Wahlqvist said.

When the overall findings were adjusted for these aspects, the quality of elders' diets was still significantly associated with that of young people's.

The researchers believe grandparents may be even more likely than parents to influence food habits.

"It is likely that the grandparent generation is transmitting what the cultural group has acquired over several generations, modulated by their children and grandchildren," Professor Wahlqvist said.

The research also raised the possibility that the association works both ways, with children's familiarity with information technology, for example, boosting their influence over their elders.

Given the links between diet and health issues such as obesity and

longevity, the intergenerational associations are particularly relevant, Professor Wahlqvist said.

"Our findings suggest that a decline in nutritional capacity in communities, represented by intergenerational transfer of food patterns, may place [community health](#) at risk. At the same time, the observations suggest that intervening with healthy eating measures in one generation may benefit other generations as well."

The study, which also involved the National Health Research Institutes, Taiwan, will be published later this month in the *Ecology of Food and Nutrition* journal.

Provided by Monash University

Citation: Diet quality links old and young (2013, December 18) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-12-diet-quality-links-young.html>

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