

Parents matter more than they think in how their children eat

March 18 2014, by Jackie Brinkman



(Medical Xpress)—Helping children learn to eat well can be a challenge. Some children happily eat whatever is put in front of them while others seem to eat like birds and exist more on air than food. A new study by a researcher at the University of Colorado School of Medicine shows that parents influence how much children eat more than they may think.

In this collaborative study between the CU School of Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine and University of Alabama Birmingham, researchers observed normal, everyday mealtimes in the homes of 145 parents and their preschoolers recruited from a Head Start program in

the Houston area. They investigated the relationships between how much parents served themselves at mealtime, the amounts of foods they served to their [children](#) and how much children ate at dinner time.

The results revealed that parents served children very similar amounts to those they gave themselves and that the amounts children were served strongly predicted the amounts they ate.

For some children, this resulted in the consumption of adult-sized portions.

"The good news," said Susan Johnson, PhD, professor of pediatrics at the CU School of Medicine and a lead investigator for the study, "is that parents influence their children much more than they may feel they do. The challenge remains as to how to encourage children to consume a healthy diet and to eat amounts that help them grow appropriately. Clearly, family habits and behaviors are both incredibly important in this regard."

Johnson suggests paying attention to the portions offered to children and for parents to ensure that they offer child-sized portions of healthy foods. Prompting children to eat according to their feelings of hunger and fullness, rather than [parents](#) deciding how much is enough, also is an important step towards promoting healthy eating and growth.

This study will be published in the April 2014 issue of *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

Provided by University of Colorado Denver

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