

Biting vs. chewing: Biting into whole foods can make children rowdy

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The researchers note that when children need to bite into food with their front teeth, they are more likely to get rowdy. Credit: Daniel Miller

There's a new secret to get your child to behave at the dinner table—cut up their food and they'll relax.

A new Cornell study published in *Eating Behaviors*, found that when 6-10 year old children ate foods they had to bite with their front teeth—such as drumsticks, whole apples, or corn on the cob— they were

rowdier than when these foods had been cut. "They were twice as likely to disobey adults and twice as aggressive toward other kids," said Brian Wansink, Professor and Director of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab.

During a 4-H summer camp, 12 elementary children were observed for this 2-day study.

On the first day, half of the children were seated at one picnic table and were given chicken on the bone that had to be bitten into with their front teeth; the other half were seated at a nearby picnic table and given chicken cut into bite sized pieces. On the second day, the conditions were reversed. Each day, two camp counselors instructed the children to stay inside a circle with a 9-foot radius. Both meal sessions were videotaped and evaluated by trained coders who indicated how aggressive or compliant the children were, and if they exhibited any atypical behaviors, such as jumping and standing on the picnic tables.

Results from both the counselors and coders observations indicated that when children were served chicken on the bone, they acted twice as aggressively, and were twice as likely to disobey adults, than when they were served bite sized pieces of chicken. Furthermore, the children who were served chicken on the bone left the circle without permission more frequently and were more likely to jump and stand on the picnic tables.

Along with Wansink, the research was conducted with Guido Camps now at Wageningen University and Research Center; Francesca Zampollo now at Auckland University of Technology; and Mitsuru Shimizu, now at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

In conclusion, the researchers note that when [children](#) need to bite into food with their front teeth, they are more likely to get rowdy! The bottom line for parents is this "If you want a nice quiet, relaxing meal with your kids, cut up their food," according to Wansink. He had

different bottom line advice for school lunchroom staff, "If drumsticks, apples, or corn on the cob is on the menu, duck!"

More information: Brian Wansink, Francesca Zampollo, Guido Camps & Mitsuru Shimizu. (2014) Biting versus Chewing: Eating Style and Social Aggression in Children. *Eating Behaviors*, forthcoming. [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2014.03.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2014.03.013)

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