

Parents need more guidance to prevent toddlers overeating

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Credit: Nguyễn Thái Học via Flickr

Reducing toddlers' portion sizes or number of eating occasions could potentially help to target weight gain in later life according to new research from UCL.

It is the first study to look at how the appetitive traits of 'food responsiveness' (the urge to [eat](#) in response to the sight or smell of appetising food) and 'satiety responsiveness' (sensitivity to internal 'fullness' signals') relate to the eating behaviours of toddlers in an

everyday context.

The report found that these two appetitive traits follow different eating patterns. Children who are very responsive to food cues eat more frequently (i.e. more times per day), and [children](#) who are less sensitive to internal fullness sensations consume more calories each time they eat. These eating behaviours may be potential mechanisms through which children exhibiting these appetitive traits are at risk of weight gain.

Hayley Syrad, UCL Department of Epidemiology & Public Health, said:

"A number of previous studies have shown that children who are highly food responsive and/or have poor satiety responsiveness tend to be heavier, but how this might occur is not clear. Our study sheds some light on how the eating behaviours of children exhibiting these traits could potentially lead to [weight gain](#).

"Assessing eating behaviour in early childhood could help identify children potentially at risk of obesity later in life.

"Currently there is little guidance for parents of young children on recommended eating frequency and [portion sizes](#), and our research suggests that some parents may need more tailored advice and information if their child is at risk of overeating."

The study used data from 1102 families with twins (2203 children) born in 2007 from the Gemini twin birth cohort, a large national cohort which focusses on early childhood weight trajectories, appetite and the family environment.

'Food responsiveness' and 'satiety [responsiveness](#)' were assessed with the Child Eating Behaviour Questionnaire (CEBQ) when children were 16 months old; and eating behaviours were determined from 3-day diet

diaries completed by parents when children were 21 months old. The average eating frequency was 5 and ranged from 1 to 10 times per day and the average size of each eating occasion was 180 calories, ranging from 59 to 417 calories per eating occasion.

Appetitive traits and food intake patterns in early life will be published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

More information: H. Syrad et al. Appetitive traits and food intake patterns in early life, *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2015).
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