

Adolescents' cooking skills strongly predict future nutritional well-being

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Evidence suggests that developing cooking and food preparation skills is important for health and nutrition, yet the practice of home cooking is declining and now rarely taught in school. A new study published in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* found that developing cooking skills as a young adult may have long-term benefits for health and nutrition.

"The impact of developing cooking skills early in life may not be apparent until later in adulthood when individuals have more opportunity and responsibility for meal preparation," said lead author Jennifer Utter, PhD, MPH, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand. "The strength of this study is the large, population-based sample size followed over a period of 10 years to explore the impact of perceived cooking skills on later nutritional well-being."

Data were collected as part of the Project Eating and Activity in Teens and Young Adults longitudinal study conducted in Minneapolis-Saint Paul area schools. Participants reported on adequacy of cooking skills in 2002-2003 when they were 18 to 23 years old. Data was then collected in 2015-2016 on nutrition-related outcomes when participants were 30 to 35 years old. Questions assessed the perceived adequacy of cooking skills, how often they prepared a meal that included vegetables, how often they ate meals as a family, and how often they ate at a [fast food restaurant](#).

Most participants perceived their cooking skills to be adequate at age 18

- 23, with approximately one quarter of adults reporting their cooking skills to be very adequate. There were no differences in perceived cooking skills by sex, race or ethnicity, educational attainment, or age. Perceived adequacy of cooking skills predicted multiple indicators of nutrition outcomes later in adulthood including greater odds of preparing a meal with vegetables most days and less frequent consumption of fast food. If those who perceived their cooking skills as adequate had families, they ate more frequent family meals, less frequent [fast food](#) meals, and had fewer barriers to food preparation.

"Opportunities to develop cooking skills by adolescents may result in long-term benefits for nutritional well-being," said Dr. Utter. "Families, health and [nutrition](#) professionals, educators, community agencies, and funders can continue to invest in home economics and cooking education knowing that the benefits may not be fully realized until [young adults](#) develop more autonomy and live independently."

More information: Jennifer Utter et al, Self-Perceived Cooking Skills in Emerging Adulthood Predict Better Dietary Behaviors and Intake 10 Years Later: A Longitudinal Study, *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jneb.2018.01.021](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2018.01.021)

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