

Becoming new parents increases produce purchases

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In the United States, both children and adults eat too few fruits and vegetables, which puts them at risk for poor diet quality and adverse health consequences. A new study in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* found new parents increased their spending on produce in middle- and high-income households.

"Although adult food preferences are considered relatively stable, major life events such as becoming parents may serve as a cue to [behavior change](#)," said lead author Betsy Q. Cliff, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Health Management and Policy, University of Michigan School of Public Health, Ann Arbor, MI. "This creates opportunities for nutrition education programs aimed at increasing produce consumption."

This study used data available through the Nielsen Homescan Consumer Panel dataset. The panel, which is ongoing, includes over 40,000 participants who volunteer to have their retail purchases tracked. Panelists use in-home scanners to record all purchases. Categories of purchases include dry groceries, dairy, frozen food, and [fresh produce](#). Nielsen also collects demographic information from participants such as number of children, employment status, education, etc.

The authors used [demographic data](#) from 2007 to 2015 to determine that 508 households in the panel became parents during the study period. The grocery budgets for these families were tracked to determine overall produce, fruits, vegetables, fresh produce, canned produce, frozen produce, and produce with another storage type. Gaining a child

prompted an increase in the percent of a household's grocery budget spent on produce; on average pre-parenthood households spent 10 percent of their budget on produce, which increased to 12 percent once the household included kids. However, the increase was only apparent in households with an income greater than 185 percent of the US [federal poverty level](#) (about \$39,000 for a family of 3 in 2019). Among families with an income lower than 185 percent of the federal poverty level, there was no detectable change in fresh produce purchases. Although both fruit and vegetable purchases increased, fresh fruit had the greater increase. There was no detectable change in purchases of canned, frozen, or other storage types of produce.

While increased spending was identified, the factors that resulted in increased spending were not explored in this study. It is unknown if parents' change in spending resulted from an increase in quality versus quantity of produce. Other limitations of the data include that they do not include food eaten outside of the home, it is possible that all purchases were not scanned, and the price of produce does not reflect any discount due to vouchers or coupons.

Betsy Cliff emphasized, "Increased purchasing by higher income households suggests further support is needed to help low-income [new parents](#) increase produce as a part of their families' diet."

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