

# Study: Impulsiveness tied to faster eating in children, can lead to obesity

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Children who eat slower are less likely to be extroverted and impulsive, according to a new study co-led by the University at Buffalo and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

The research, which sought to uncover the relationship between [temperament](#) and eating behaviors in [early childhood](#), also found that kids who were highly responsive to external food cues (the urge to eat when food is seen, smelled or tasted) were more likely to experience frustration and discomfort and have difficulties self-soothing.

These findings are critical because faster eating and greater responsiveness to food cues have been linked to [obesity risk](#) in children, says Myles Faith, Ph.D., co-author and professor of counseling, school and educational psychology in the UB Graduate School of Education.

The research, published in June in *Pediatric Obesity*, supports the integration of temperament into studies of and treatment for childhood obesity, a connection Faith deemed in need of further exploration in a previous study he co-led.

"Temperament is linked to many child developmental and behavioral outcomes, yet despite emerging evidence, few studies have examined its relationship with pediatric obesity," said co-lead investigator Robert Berkowitz, MD, emeritus professor at the University of Pennsylvania and director of the Weight and Eating Disorders Research Program at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Co-lead investigator Alyssa Button, doctoral candidate in the UB Graduate School of Education, is the first author.

The researchers surveyed 28 participants beginning a family intervention program to reduce eating speed among 4- to 8-year-old children with or at risk for obesity.

The study examined the associations between three eating behaviors and three facets of temperament. The eating behaviors included responsiveness to feeling full (internal food cues); responsiveness to

seeing, smelling and tasting food (external food cues); and eating speed. Temperament consisted of extroversion and impulsivity (also known as surgency); self-control; and the inability to self-sooth [negative emotions](#) such as anger, fear and sadness.

Among the findings is that children who respond well to feeling full exhibit more self-control. More research is needed to understand the role parents play in their children's temperament and eating behavior, says Button.

"Parents may use [food](#) to soothe temperamental children and ease negative emotions," says Button, also a senior research support specialist in the Department of Pediatrics in the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at UB. "Future research should examine the different ways parents feed their children in response to their temperament, as well as explore whether the relationship between temperament and eating behaviors is a two-way street. Could the habit of eating slower, over time, lead to lower impulsiveness?"

"This study established relationships between temperament and eating patterns in [children](#); however, there is still the question of chicken-and-egg and which comes first?" says Faith. "Research that follows families over time is needed to untangle these developmental pathways."

**More information:** Alyssa Button et al, Temperament and eating self-regulation in young children with or at risk for obesity: An exploratory report, *Pediatric Obesity* (2021). [DOI: 10.1111/ijpo.12821](https://doi.org/10.1111/ijpo.12821)

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