

Beyond childhood: Picky eating in college students

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Looking beyond the picky eating of childhood, researchers looked at this behavior in college students. Self-identified picky eaters ate significantly less fiber and vegetables and reported greater levels of social phobia than non-picky eaters, according to a new study in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*. Social phobia is the fear of being evaluated during everyday activities by others.

"Picky eating is typically defined as the rejection of both familiar and new foods. It is a common occurrence during childhood; however, there are cases in which [picky eating](#) can persist into adolescence and adulthood. The primary aim of this study was to examine relationships between picky eating behaviors and dietary consumption as well as some of the psychosocial outcomes that might be associated with this, like social phobia, quality of life and picky eating distress. We were also interested in examining picky eating as an eating identity," said Lauren Dial, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH, U.S..

Of the 488 Midwestern undergraduate students, 190 identified as a picky eater (almost 40%). Most picky eaters (65%) reported consuming a diet of fewer than 10 foods. In addition to [social phobia](#), picky eating was associated with overall and situational distress and lower quality of life. The challenges of picky eaters included finding acceptable [food](#), not eating, other people they were eating with, and excessive meal planning.

Interestingly, some benefits of picky eating reported by participants resembled versions of reported challenges. For example, difficulty finding acceptable foods is opposite to enjoying simplicity in selecting foods or restaurants. However, participants from the same sample viewed eating in restaurants as a challenge and a benefit. These qualitative results suggest that picky eating in adulthood is a multifaceted, complex phenomenon in which the variability in reported challenges and benefits may depend on variables like age, gender and

[social support](#).

"Overall, this study sheds some more light on the consequences of picky eating in [young adults](#) and might help future research identify how picky eating is related to other eating behaviors," Dial said.

More information: Consequences of Picky Eating in College Students, *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jneb.2021.07.006](#)

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