

Eating behaviors of parents play a role in teens' emotional eating

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Emotional eating, or eating as a coping mechanism for negative, positive, or stress-driven emotions, is associated with unhealthy dietary patterns and weight gain. A research article featured in the *Journal of Nutrition*

Education and Behavior discusses adolescent vulnerability to emotional eating and how various feeding practices used by parents, such as restriction, food as reward, and child involvement, influence eating behavior.

"Emotional eating was previously found to be more learned than inherited. This study examined not only the interaction between [parents](#) when feeding their children, but also what children learned from watching their parents eat," said lead author Joanna Klosowska, MSc, Department of Public Health and Primary Care, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium.

The initial study was conducted in 2017 with 218 families. Additionally, longitudinal data collected in 2013 were also available. One parent from each family completed the Child Feeding Questionnaire, as well as the Child Feeding Practices Questionnaire, and both adolescent and parent completed the Dutch Eating Behavior Questionnaire. Emotion regulation was assessed with the Dutch version of the child-reported FEEL-KJ questionnaire. The adolescent's body weight and height were measured by researchers.

Over the four years between 2013 and 2017, covering the time from late childhood to middle adolescence, changes occurred in some parental practices. Parents reported higher monitoring and healthy modeling feeding practices, while the reported levels of food restriction and the healthy environment remained unchanged. During the same time period, adolescents reported a considerable increase in emotional eating from below the average in 2013 to above the average in 2017, according to the norms for the Dutch population. Additionally, the maladaptive way in which they regulated their emotions was also associated with emotional eating.

Food as a reward and [monitoring food](#) increased emotional eating,

especially in instances where the adolescent employed maladaptive strategies in regulating their emotions. Child involvement in meals had an opposite effect since it was associated with higher levels of emotion regulation and lower levels of emotional eating. Interestingly, a parent's restrained eating behavior was linked to less emotional eating in adolescents.

"This study suggests that parents continue to play an important role in their child's eating behavior into their teen years," said Klosowska. "Additional research is needed to understand the impact restrained eating demonstrated by a parent impacts the [emotional eating](#) of a child."

More information: Emotion Regulation Moderates the Associations of Food Parenting and Adolescent Emotional Eating, *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jneb.2022.05.002](#)

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