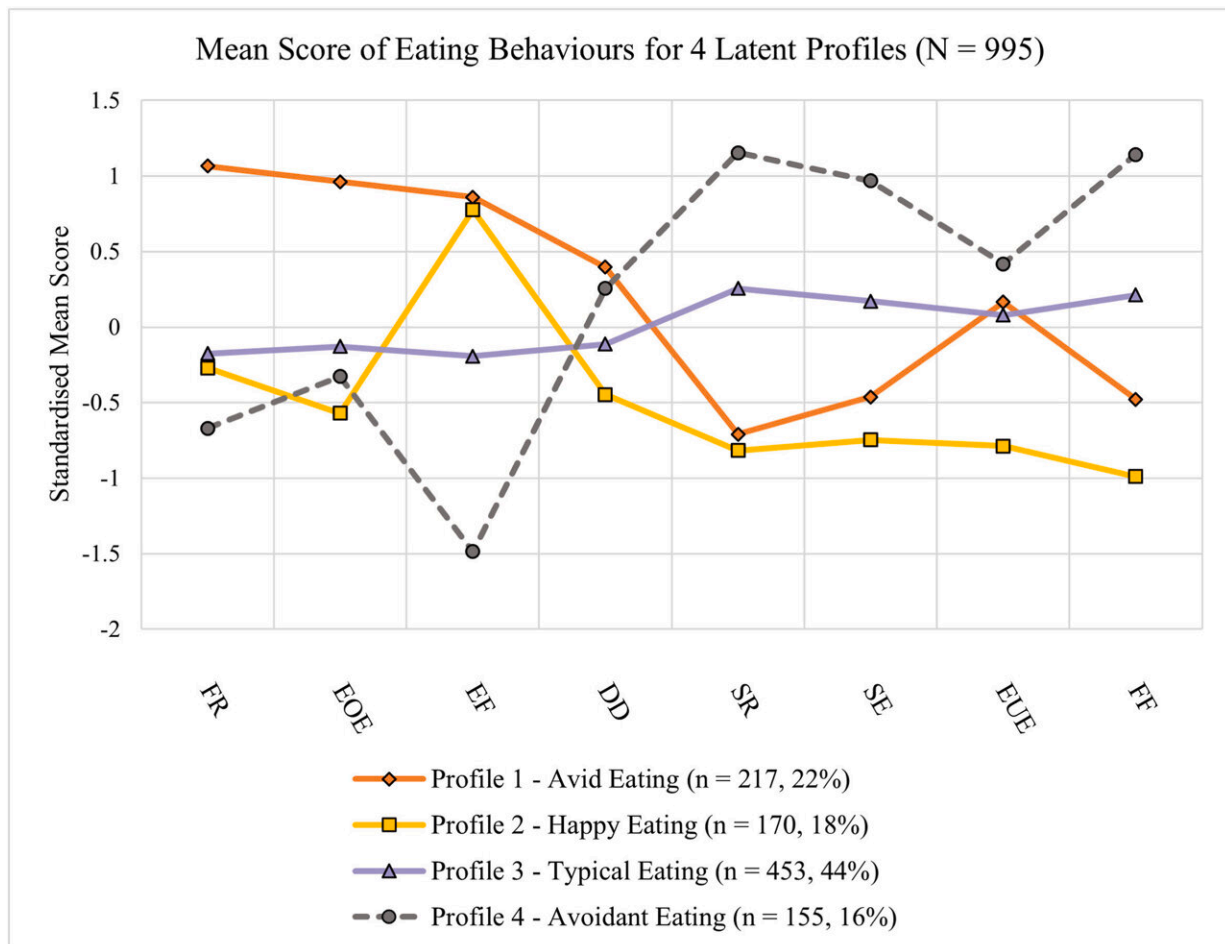


Research identifies four eating behavior patterns in children

October 18 2023



Mean score of eating behaviors for 4 latent profiles (N = 995). Note: FR = Food Responsiveness, EOE = Emotional Overeating, EF = Enjoyment of Food, DD = Desire to Drink, SR = Satiety Responsiveness, SE = Slowness of Eating, EUE = Emotional Undereating, FF = Food Fussiness. Credit: *Appetite* (2023). DOI: 10.1016/j.appet.2023.107050

Children fall broadly into four eating categories, according to new research at Aston University, and parents feed their children differently depending on those categories.

The four categories identified by Dr. Abigail Pickard and the team in the School of Psychology are "avid," "happy," "typical," and "fussy." The research is [published](#) in the journal *Appetite*.

In the U.K., about a fifth of children are overweight or living with obesity when they begin school, rising to around a third by the time they leave primary school at age 11. The team sought to identify eating [behavior patterns](#) and how these are associated with temperament, feeding practices and [food insecurity](#), as a way to predict which children are more at risk of becoming overweight.

Typical eaters made up 44% of the children in the study, while fussy eaters accounted for 16%. But of greatest interest to the team was that around 1 in 5 [young children](#) in the study were found to show "avid eating," including greater enjoyment of food, faster eating speed, and weaker sensitivity to internal cues of "fullness."

The behaviors that distinguish children with avid eating from those who show "happy" eating (17.7% of children in the study), who have similarly positive responses to food, are wanting to eat (or eating more) in response to the sight, smell or taste of palatable food, and a higher level of emotional overeating. In combination, these eating behaviors can lead to overeating and subsequent weight gain.

Dr. Pickard and the team, which includes academics from Aston University, Loughborough University, Kings College London and University College London (UCL), have also shown that there are

significant differences in children's temperament and caregivers' feeding practices between each of the four eating behavior patterns.

Children with avid eating are more likely to be active and impulsive, and their caregivers are more likely to give them food to regulate their emotions or to restrict food for health reasons. Children with avid eating were also less food secure than children who showed happy or typical eating behaviors.

Principal investigator of the project, Professor Jackie Blissett, said, "While feeding practices are key intervention targets to change children's eating behavior and child weight outcomes, there has been little evaluation of how feeding practices interact with children's food approach behaviors to predict eating behavior."

She explained that despite the knowledge of the influence of feeding practices on children's weight, current public health advice is generic and does not reflect variability in children's appetites. Parents and caregivers can be left feeling frustrated when trying to manage their child's food intake.

By defining the four eating behavior profiles, this research project, which is co-developed by Professor Claire Farrow, Dr. Clare Llewellyn, Dr. Moritz Herle, Professor Emma Haycraft and Dr. Helen Croker will make it easier to identify the best feeding practices for each eating pattern and provide tailored, effective advice for parents.

Dr. Pickard said, "Parents can use this research to help them understand what type of eating pattern their child presents. Then based on the child's eating profile the parent can adapt their feeding strategies to the child. For example, children in the avid eating profile may benefit more from covert restriction of [food](#), i.e., not bringing snacks into the home or not having foods on display, to reduce the temptation to eat foods in the

absence of hunger. Whereas, if a child shows fussy eating behavior it would be more beneficial for the child to have a balanced and varied selection of foods on show to promote trying foods without pressure to eat."

The team has planned further research investigating avid eating behavior and will invite the caregivers and their children into the specialist eating behavior lab at Aston University to get a better picture of what avid and typical eating behaviors look like in a real-life setting. All the findings will be integrated and the researchers will work with parents to develop feasible and helpful feeding guidelines to reduce [children's](#) intake of palatable snack foods.

More information: Abigail Pickard et al, Identifying an avid eating profile in childhood: Associations with temperament, feeding practices and food insecurity, *Appetite* (2023). DOI: [10.1016/j.appet.2023.107050](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2023.107050)

Provided by Aston University

Citation: Research identifies four eating behavior patterns in children (2023, October 18) retrieved 13 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-10-behavior-patterns-children.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--