

# Authoritative parenting style influences family eating behavior and better nutrition in adolescents

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Investigators from the University of Minnesota have found a direct association between parenting style and the frequency of meals eaten together as a family and that an authoritative parenting style was associated with more frequent family meals. Their data further indicated that family meals have a positive influence on adolescents to eat a healthy diet. The results of the study are published in the July issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*.

With a basis in whether parents are responsive and/or demanding, parenting style can be divided into four types: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful. Parents who were empathic and respectful, but who maintained clear boundaries and expectations, were classified as authoritative. Authoritarian parents maintained strict discipline and showed little warmth. The permissive style was empathic but with few rules, while the neglectful style was emotionally uninvolved with no rules or expectations.

"Although further research is needed, results suggest that it is important for dietitians and other health care providers to reinforce authoritative parenting styles in order to increase the likelihood of occurrence of [family meals](#)," according to lead investigator Jerica M. Berge, PhD, Department of Family Medicine and Community Health, University of Minnesota Medical School, Minneapolis. "Health providers can play an important role in reinforcing the benefits of authoritative parenting style, helping parents set realistic goals for family meals, exploring ways to enhance parenting skills during family meals, discussing strategies to help parents be more authoritative, and making referrals for parents who are in need of further parenting skills training. In recommending family meals, it is important for dietitians and other [health care providers](#) to take broader parenting styles into

account. Family meals may be easier for families with authoritative parenting styles because they have routines, whereas family meals may be more challenging for other families and will require more time to address."

The authors used survey data from Project EAT (Eating Among Teens), in which two groups of adolescents (1608 middle school and 3074 high school students) completed surveys in 1999 and 2004 regarding eating habits, parental styles, and various socioeconomic variables.

Cross-sectional results for adolescent girls indicated a positive association between maternal and paternal authoritative parenting style and frequency of family meals. For adolescent boys, maternal authoritative parenting style was associated with more frequent family meals. Longitudinal results indicated that authoritative [parenting style](#) predicted higher frequency of family meals five years later, but only between mothers and sons or between fathers and daughters.

**More information:** The article is "Parenting Style and Family Meals: Cross-Sectional and 5-year Longitudinal Associations" by Jerica M Berge, PhD; Melanie Wall, PhD; Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, PhD; Nicole Larson, PhD; and Mary Story, PhD. It appears in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, Volume 110, Issue 7 (July 2010)

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