

Longer family meals as a way to get your children to eat more fruits and vegetables

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Children will eat more fruits and vegetables if families take more time to eat meals. This is the result of a new study of health psychologist Professor Jutta Mata from the University of Mannheim and Professor Ralph Hertwig, Director at the Center for Adaptive Rationality of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin.

Their experiment shows that [children](#) will eat significantly more fruits and [vegetables](#) if they stay at the table for only ten minutes longer than usual—30 minutes in total. On average, they ate about 100 grams more fruits and vegetables. This represents about one of the five recommended daily portions of fruits and vegetables and is the equivalent of a small apple or a small bell pepper. The results of the study have been published in the journal *JAMA Network Open*.

"This outcome has practical importance for [public health](#) because one additional daily portion of [fruit](#) and vegetables reduces the risk of cardiometabolic disease by 6 to 7%," explains Professor Mata. "For such an effect, enough fruits and vegetables need to be available on the table—bite-sized pieces are best," the health psychologist adds.

Fifty pairs of parents and 50 children participated in the study. The average age of children in the study was eight years and the average age of parents was 43 years. An equal number of boys and girls participated. The participants were served a typical German dinner of sliced bread, cold cuts, and cheese as well as fruits and vegetables, cut into bite-sized pieces.

"The duration of the meal is one of the central components of a family meal which parents can vary to improve the diet of their children. We had already found hints of this relation in [a meta-analysis](#) on studies looking at the qualitative components of healthy family meals. In this new experimental study, we were able to prove a formerly only correlative relationship," says Ralph Hertwig, Director at the Center for

Adaptive Rationality of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development.

The study also shows that longer family meals did not lead to the children eating more bread or cold cuts, they also did not eat more dessert. Researchers assume that the bite-sized pieces of fruits and vegetables were easier to eat and thus more enticing.

More information: Mattea Dallacker et al, Effect of Longer Family Meals on Children's Fruit and Vegetable Intake, *JAMA Network Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.6331](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.6331)

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