

Eat up! Do dads push food on toddlers?

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Credit: Queensland University of Technology

Well-meaning dads may be over-feeding their toddlers and increasing the risk of childhood obesity, according to a QUT and Flinders University study being presented at the European Congress on Obesity in Vienna today.

The researchers compared mothers' and fathers' feeding practices and their preliminary evidence suggests dads are more likely to want their child to "eat up" and gain weight, despite feeling less responsible overall for meal giving.

"Dads really are the forgotten parent when it comes to health education and getting positive messages across to families with young children," said QUT Emeritus Professor Lynne Daniels, who led the study.

"Our survey found that fathers felt less involved in child feeding, but when they were involved many of them approached it differently to mums.

"Fathers were more likely to pressure the child to eat and less likely to let the child control how much he or she ate."

The researchers looked at survey results from 70 dads whose families were already part of QUT's long-running obesity prevention study, NOURISH,

which monitored nearly 700 mothers and their children until age five.

"These mums were split into two groups, with one group receiving extra information about positive [feeding practices](#) and [healthy eating](#)," Professor Daniels said.

"We also asked that group to share their additional information with other people who fed their children, such as dads and grandparents.

"Our survey of fathers showed that dads whose families were in the group that received this extra advice also took that information onboard and were less likely to pressure their [child](#) to eat extra food.

"So we think [dads](#) can respond to public health information just as well as mums and should also be directly targeted by healthy eating campaigns that aim to prevent [childhood obesity](#).

"Fathers' contribution to the early feeding environment is increasingly important given social changes to employment and parenting responsibilities.

"But there have been no intervention studies to date regarding early feeding that include [fathers](#)."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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