

Children with ASD are not just picky eaters

November 27 2018, by Kristen Mitchell

Convincing young children to try new foods can be a dinner time stressor for any family, but for parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) meal time challenges are often not just a phase.

New research by Greg Wallace, an assistant professor in the Department of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences in the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, found that children who present ASD traits were rated as more [food](#) neophobic than their same-age non-ASD peers. Neophobia is the fear of anything new that can manifest as the unwillingness to try new things or break from routine.

Dr. Wallace's research finds that elevated ASD traits like social and communication difficulties and [repetitive behavior](#), in conjunction with food neophobia, predicted a higher body mass index than what is typical for children who show signs of food neophobia alone. These clinical connections between ASD traits and feeding behaviors could affect health outcomes and need further study, Dr. Wallace said.

"People with autism are at increased risk of becoming overweight or obese," he said. "You've got these tensions of what is going on that's all framed against the traditional notion that food neophobia and selective eating are associated with being underweight, but that may or may not be the case in the immediate or the long term with autism."

Researchers have long known of a link between eating difficulties and people on the autism spectrum. In some cases, people with ASD may be hyper-sensitive to food textures, shapes and colors. Some endure a range

of physical difficulties from swallowing issues to gastrointestinal distress. These traits are often attributed to picky eating, but for children with ASD these habits are not simply a phase.

Dr. Wallace is interested in learning more about the potential shared underpinning that links these two classes of behavioral traits. The connection between ASD and food neophobia will help experts predict [health outcomes](#) and develop targeted intervention strategies.

Dr. Wallace published a paper on his findings last month in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, alongside United Kingdom-based co-authors from University of London and University of Leeds. Their findings are based on a dataset of [children](#) born in England and Wales.

Provided by George Washington University

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