

Only-children more likely to be obese than children with siblings

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Families with multiple children tend to make more healthy eating decisions than families with a single child.

A new study in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, published by Elsevier, found that [only-children](#), who researchers refer to as "singletons," had less healthy family eating practices, beverage choices, and total Healthy Eating Index 2010 score, coming in lower on three out of the 12 areas measured. They also had significantly lower total scores across weekdays, weekends, and on average, indicating there are both individual and collective differences in eating patterns between the groups.

"Nutrition professionals must consider the influence of family and siblings to provide appropriate and tailored nutrition education for families of young children," said lead author Chelsea L. Kracht, Ph.D. Dr. Kracht completed the research during her Ph.D. program alongside Dr. Susan Sisson at the University of Oklahoma Health

Sciences Center, Oklahoma City, OK. "Efforts to help all children and families establish healthy eating habits and practices must be encouraged."

Data was self-reported in daily food logs kept by mothers over the course of three days—two weekdays and one weekend day. Teachers kept logs by proxy for any food children ate while at school. Mothers also completed the Family Nutrition and Physical Activity questionnaire to evaluate typical family eating behaviors like food and beverage choice.

Researchers found mothers of singleton children were more likely to be obese themselves. Moreover, maternal BMI had a much stronger connection to child BMI percentile and waist circumference percentile than singleton status. Maternal BMI did not significantly contribute to overall eating patterns but did contribute to empty calories.

The study only looked at mothers and children and so could not speak to the impact of fathers' eating patterns, but the results were independent of marital status.

The study also found that time spent in away-from-home care like school and daycare was not connected to children's eating patterns. This points to the difference coming from inside the household, including a difference in how frequently the family eats in front of the television (family eating practices score) and sugary drinks consumption (beverage choices score), which differed between groups in the study.

"Healthier eating behaviors and patterns may result from household-level changes rather than peer exposure, as peer exposure is also present in away-from-home care," Dr. Kracht said.

Dr. Kracht and her colleagues are continuing their research, looking specifically into household and

[family](#) dynamics and how they influence children's eating behavior, physical activity, sleep, and other factors contributing to obesity.

More information: *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (2019). DOI: [10.1016/j.jneb.2019.08.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2019.08.004)

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