

How Children's Food Preferences Influence Their Mother's Diets

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Introduction

We are familiar with how mothers strongly influence their children's diets, but we are less familiar with how a child's food preferences influence the mother

Objective

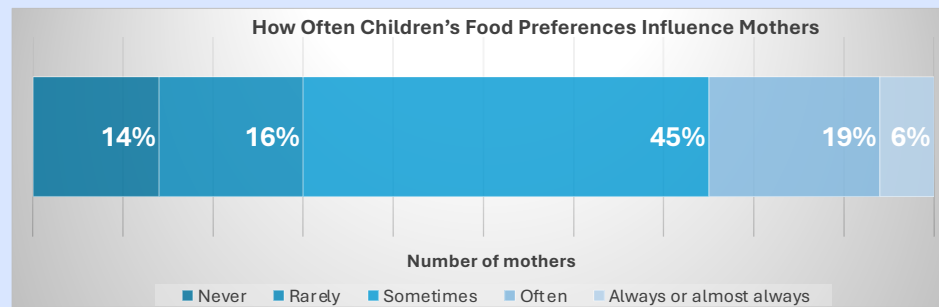
To explore how children's food preferences affect mothers' eating behaviors.

Methods

- Data came from an online cross-sectional survey conducted in June 2024
- Participants were English-speaking mothers in the U.S. with children aged 0-12 years who used social media
- The survey collected information on sociodemographic and family characteristics
- Mothers reported how often and how their children's food preferences influenced what they ate
- Open-ended responses were analyzed using conventional content analysis to identify themes

Results

- A total of 313 mothers were included in the analysis (out of 316 respondents).
- Most mothers (86%) said their children's food preferences influenced what they eat at least occasionally.
- Open-ended responses were analyzed to identify the drivers behind family food decisions and the specific impact on mothers' diets



Main findings

Driver of Family Food Decisions (n=260)

- **Child-driven family food choices (67%)**
 - Keeping preferred foods in stock or preparing things "the fewest people will complain about"
- **Shared or negotiated decision-making (20%)**
 - Families take everyone's preferences into account or plan together
- **Parent-driven family food choices (9%)**
 - Mothers may cook something separate for themselves if meal is less healthy

Impact on Maternal Diet (n=42)

- **Less frequent intake of preferred foods (45%)**
 - Mothers often remove their own favorite meals from the rotation because they don't "go over well with the kids"
- **Higher intake of non-preferred foods (36%)**
 - Mothers may eat less healthy options for convenience or to avoid making two separate meals
- **Higher intake of health-promoting foods (17%)**
 - Some mothers eat more fruits and vegetables to model good behavior for their children

Illustrative examples

- "I keep things they prefer in stock and prepare things that the fewest people will complain about."
- "We all try to eat the same meals, especially for dinner. So we take everyone's preferences into account."
- "I might prepare a vegetable the way they like it most rather than what I like"
- "If I need to feed them, I go with what they are having instead of what is best for me/my health"
- "I try not to eat a lot of sugary things because if I do my youngest will want them too"

Conclusion

Most mothers reported that their children's food preferences influenced what they eat at least occasionally. The influence was more common among mothers with fewer resources or less formal education. These findings suggest that children's preferences may shape family food environments and should be considered in nutrition education and family-based interventions.

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