

## EFFECTS ON CHILD NUTRITION PATTERNS

Maternal employment has a substantial impact on children's nutritional habits, a study on Japanese schoolchildren has revealed.

Social determinants are widely acknowledged to be pivotal in the establishment of a child's lifestyle and healthful behavior; however, previous studies have produced conflicting results on the causal association between maternal employment and childhood obesity or dietary intake.

Investigators at the University College of London evaluated questionnaires completed by 8,906 children (aged 12–13 years) enrolled in the Toyama birth cohort study. The children answered questions on the frequency of meals, the speed at which they ate their meals and the portion size of breakfast, snack and dinner on school days as well as their height and weight recorded at the latest school physical examination.

Children of full-time working mothers were more prone to snack and miss dinner than children of part-time employed or unemployed mothers. The study also revealed a graded association between mothers' employment status and the BMI of their offspring: children of unemployed mothers had the lowest BMI, whereas children of full-time employed mothers had the highest.

The investigators suggest that reduced supervision of meal intake by full-time working mothers might result in unhealthy dietary habits in their children. "Full-time employed mothers need to know the effect of full-time employment on child nutrition patterns," says lead author Alexandru Gaina. Strategies implemented to promote child health should, therefore, take into account maternal employment status as a critical factor that influences dietary habits. Gaina and colleagues will continue to monitor the children in the Toyama cohort throughout high school and plan to compare their findings with research on non-Japanese children.

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