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## Parenting styles, child and mother dietary behaviour: are there relationships?

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It is estimated that by 2050, at least a quarter of all children will be classified as obese<sup>(1)</sup>. There is a plethora of literature surrounding interventions aimed at preventing or reducing overweight and obesity in children. However, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that any particular approach is successful<sup>(2)</sup>. There are several factors documented in the literature, which are thought to be linked to children's dietary habits; the main one being parental influence. It is believed that the parenting style adopted by a parent has a major impact on a child's dietary preferences and consumption<sup>(3,4)</sup>.

The Gateshead Millennium Study is a longitudinal prospective birth cohort study of 1029 children who were born in Gateshead between 1999 and 2000. When the children were 6–8 years of age, the mothers' feeding and parenting practices were examined; these were drawn from the Food Environment Questionnaire. Each type of parenting practice was assigned a 'score'<sup>(5)</sup> and categorised into one of the three dominant parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian or permissive<sup>(6)</sup>. Dietary data collected from both mothers and children were analysed to determine whether parenting styles and mother's dietary habits influenced the child's dietary habits and consumption.

Weak but significant correlations were recorded between mother's and child's dietary intake in all the observed food groups; this finding is comparable with other studies involving children under the age of 9 years in the UK and USA<sup>(7,8)</sup>. Permissive parenting and feeding styles were found to be associated with a higher consumption of sugary squash, carbonated drinks, crisps and savoury snacks and a lower consumption of fruit, vegetables and wholemeal bread. There were no associations with the consumption of white bread, confectionery or reduced sugar beverages.

Food group	Parenting style (rank associations) *sig at 5% **sig at 1%		
	Authoritarian (n 8)	Permissive (n 101)	Authoritative (n 346)
Wholemeal bread	0.02	-0.16**	-0.05
Chips	0.01	0.12**	0.03
Fruit and vegetables	0	-0.19**	-0.09*
Fruit	-0.01	-0.12*	-0.05
Vegetables	0.04	-0.19**	-0.10**
Crisps and savoury snacks	-0.02	0.16**	0.01
Sugary squash and carbonated drinks	0.04	0.22**	-0.04

These findings indicate a need for further research to determine whether and how the role of parenting style can be incorporated into future childhood obesity prevention strategies.

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