

Association of Enjoyable Childhood Mealtimes with Adult Eating Behaviors and Subjective Diet-related Quality of Life

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examined whether the experience of enjoyable mealtimes at home during childhood was related to eating behaviors and subjective diet-related quality of life in adulthood.

Methods: The study used data ($n = 2,936$) obtained from a research program about *Shokuiku* (food and nutrition education) conducted by the Cabinet Office in Japan in November and December 2009. The study employed logistic regression adjusted for all predictor variables.

Results: Enjoyable eating experiences in childhood were positively associated with a balanced diet (meals with 3 dishes; odds ratio [OR]: 1.78, 95% confidence interval [CI]: 1.45–2.19), eating vegetable dishes (OR: 1.71, 95% CI: 1.37–2.12), and subjective diet-related quality of life scores (OR: 3.84, 95% CI: 3.14–4.70) in adulthood.

Conclusions and Implications: This study suggests that enjoyable eating experiences at home during childhood appear to promote healthy eating habits and the development of a positive diet-related quality of life in the future.

Key Words: child, adult, diet, quality of life, retrospective study (*J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2013;45:274–278.)

INTRODUCTION

Recent increases in the prevalence of overweight and obesity have been documented in many countries.^{1,2} Similarly, concerns about increases in the prevalence of middle-aged people in Japan who are overweight or obese or who suffer from metabolic syndrome have increased.^{2,3} In addition to increasing rates of obesity, the 2010 National Health and Nutrition Survey in Japan showed that average vegetable consumption was less than the recommended amount of 350 g per day among adults, that about 40% of young adults consumed dishes in which over 30% of the energy was supplied by fat, and that about 30% of young adults skipped breakfast.⁴ Thus, several areas of eating behavior could be improved.

Eating behaviors are influenced by many factors, including food environ-

ment, knowledge about diet, current attitudes toward eating, and childhood eating habits, as well as by parental diet and feeding practices.⁵ Because health and eating behaviors develop within familial environments during childhood,⁶ the characteristics of mealtimes at home can exert an important influence on children's eating behaviors.⁷ Previous studies have reported an association between eating behaviors and eating experiences in childhood and eating behavior in adulthood. For example, Larson et al used longitudinal data about family meal frequency to predict healthier eating behaviors such as a higher intake of fruits and vegetables and more regular consumption of breakfast.⁸ A previous study reported that among children, frequency of shared family meals was positively related to enjoyment of meals.⁹ Although enjoyment of meals influences eating behavior,¹⁰ very little research has ex-

amined whether enjoyment of meals during childhood influences eating behaviors or quality of life in adulthood. Indeed, no studies have collected relevant data in Asian countries, including Japan.

The purpose of this study was to examine the association of eating experiences in childhood with eating behavior and subjective diet-related quality of life (SDQOL) in adulthood using data from a population-based survey. The authors hypothesized that enjoyable and relaxed mealtimes at home during childhood would be associated with healthy eating behavior and higher SDQOL at present among adult subjects.

METHODS

Survey Sample

Data used in the present study were obtained through "Research on the present state of and consciousness about *Shokuiku* (food and nutrition education)," a study conducted by the Japanese Cabinet Office in November and December, 2009.¹¹ This research was conducted using 2-stage stratified random sampling; 5,000 subjects over the age of 20 years who lived in randomly sampled census units of the Japanese population were selected. In total, 2,936

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respondents (response rate: 58.7%) agreed to be interviewed by researchers, who visited their homes and asked questions following the completion of questionnaires. This study was approved by the Ethics Review Committee of Kagawa Nutrition University.

Measurements

Enjoyable eating experiences at home during childhood were assessed by asking participants to respond to the following statement, based on previous research^{12,13}: "I enjoyed family mealtimes and felt comfortable during them." Responses were made on a 5-point scale, ranging from "agree" (1) to "disagree" (5). For purposes of analysis, responses were scored in the inverse direction (ie, agree = 5 to disagree = 1).

Based on previous research about Japanese food,¹⁴ the researchers asked about eating behaviors in adulthood, such as the frequency with which respondents consumed a balanced diet, vegetable dishes, and dishes cooked with oil. Based on the 2008 National Nutrition Survey,¹⁵ the researchers also inquired about skipping breakfast and the typical start time of dinner.

After researchers presented a brief description of grains, vegetables, and fish and meat dishes, respondents were asked the following question about consuming a balanced diet: "How many days per week do you eat more than 2 meals with grain dishes, vegetable dishes, and fish and meat dishes?" Responses were given on a scale that included "every day," "4 or 5 days/week," "2 or 3 days/week," and "a few days/week." For purposes of analysis, 4 or 5 days/week, 2 or 3 days/week, and a few days/week were combined into "not every day" because the distribution of respondents was unbalanced.

The frequency with which respondents consumed vegetable dishes was ascertained with the following question: "How many days per week do you eat more than 2 meals with vegetable dishes?" Responses were given on the following scale: "every day," "4 or 5 days/week," "2 or 3 days/week," or "a few days/week." As with eating a balanced diet, 4 or 5 days/week, 2 or 3 days/week, and a few

days/week were combined into "not every day" because the distribution of respondents was unbalanced.

The respondents were asked, "How many days per week do you eat more than 2 meals with dishes cooked with oil (deep fried or stir fried)?" Responses were given on the following scale: "every day," "4 or 5 days/week," "2 or 3 days/week," or "a few days per week." For purposes of analysis, every day, 4 or 5 days/week, and 2 or 3 days/week were combined into "more than 2 days/week" because the distribution of respondents was unbalanced.

Respondents were asked, "How often do you usually eat breakfast?" Responses were given on the following scale: "every day," "4 or 5 days/week," "2 or 3 days/week," or "a few days/week." For purposes of analysis, 4 or 5 days/week, 2 or 3 days/week, and a few days/week were combined and labeled "skips breakfast," and every day was changed to "does not skip breakfast" because the distribution of respondents was unbalanced.

Participants completed the SDQOL questionnaire,¹⁶ which has been validated for examining the association between comfort in life and satisfaction with life, to assess diet-related quality of life in adulthood. The SDQOL is composed of 4 items ("I enjoy mealtimes," "I am eager for mealtimes to come," "My meals are eaten in a positive atmosphere," and "I am satisfied with my daily diet"). Responses were given on a 5-point scale ranging from "agree" (1) to "disagree" (5). For purposes of analysis, responses were scored in an inverse direction (ie, agree = 5 to disagree = 1).

Data on age, sex, marital status, employment status, number of family members, subjective health status, dietary restrictions, perceived economic security, and area of residence (large city: 23 wards of Tokyo or an ordinance-designated city; midsize city: more than 100,000 people; small city: cities of fewer than 100,000 people; towns and villages) were used for analysis.

Data Analysis

Participants were described in terms of demographic characteristics and distribution of eating experiences. The association between demographics and eating experience was assessed

using chi-square tests. Second, the distributions of eating behaviors were evaluated, and their associations with eating experiences were examined using chi-square tests. The median (25th, 75th percentiles) of SDQOL was used because the distribution of SDQOL scores was found to be non-normal using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($P < .05$).

Logistic regression was used to predict eating behaviors and SDQOL scores as dependent variables, using eating experience as an independent variable; this analysis was adjusted for age, sex, marital status, employment status, number of family members, subjective health status, dietary restrictions, perceived economic security, and area of residence. Significance was set at $P < .05$. Data were analyzed with PASW Statistics software (version 19.0, SPSS, Inc, Tokyo, Japan, 2010).

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 2,936 respondents. The mean (SD) age was 53.9 (15.8) years; 1,344 respondents were male (45.8%), and 1,592 were female (54.2%). Most respondents (76.7%) had a spouse.

In response to the statement about enjoyable childhood experiences during mealtimes at home, 1,498 (51.0%) participants agreed, 788 (26.8%) somewhat agreed, 486 (16.6%) were neutral, 102 (3.5%) somewhat disagreed, and 62 (2.1%) disagreed. Neutral responses were combined with somewhat-disagree and disagree responses to form 1 group of 650 (22.1%) participants who did not enjoy mealtimes; thus, 3 groups were created because the distribution of respondents was unbalanced.

The results of the association between demographics and eating experiences during childhood (Table 1) indicated that the proportion of respondents who did not have enjoyable mealtime experiences in childhood was greater among respondents over 60 years old than among younger people. Additionally, respondents who were male, married, and lived in towns or villages tended not to have had enjoyable mealtime experiences in childhood.

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