



## Research review

# How parental dietary behavior and food parenting practices affect children's dietary behavior. Interacting sources of influence?



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## ABSTRACT

Until now, the literatures on the effects of food parenting practices and parents' own dietary behavior on children's dietary behavior have largely been independent from one another. Integrating findings across these areas could provide insight on simultaneous and interacting influences on children's food intake. In this narrative review, we provide a conceptual model that bridges the gap between both literatures and consists of three main hypotheses. First, parental dietary behavior and food parenting practices are important interactive sources of influence on children's dietary behavior and Body Mass Index (BMI). Second, parental influences are importantly mediated by changes in the child's home food environment. Third, parenting context (i.e., parenting styles and differential parental treatment) moderates effects of food parenting practices, whereas child characteristics (i.e., temperament and appetitive traits) mainly moderate effects of the home food environment. Future studies testing (parts of) this conceptual model are needed to inform effective parent–child overweight preventive interventions.

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## Introduction

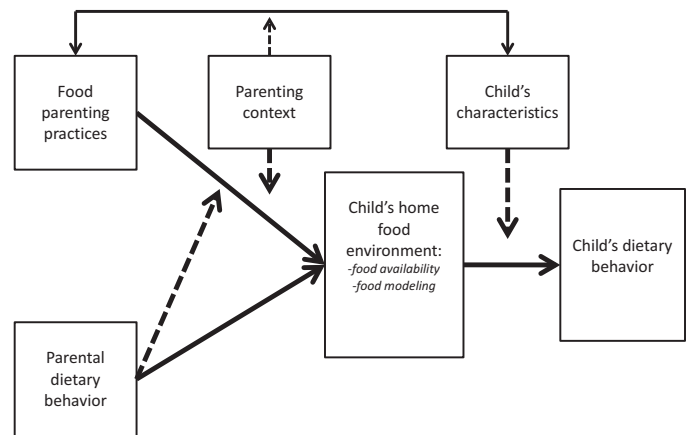
Childhood obesity is a serious public health epidemic in most industrialized countries (Ebbeling, Pawlak, & Ludwig, 2002; Lobstein, Baur, & Uauy, 2004; Wang & Lobstein, 2006). It has generally been acknowledged that facets of the current dietary environment contribute to obesity among children. Numerous obesogenic environmental influences have been distinguished according to the ANGELO (ANalysis Grid for Environments Linked to Obesity) framework, with influences being distinguished on the micro- and macro-environmental levels (Kremers, 2010; Swinburn, Egger, & Raza, 1999). Parents are considered a key influence in children's micro-environments. In this narrative review, we focus on 'diet' and 'diet-related' parenting practices, referred henceforth as 'food parenting practices' (Baranowski et al., 2013; Hughes et al., 2013). This perspective focuses on diet with the acknowledgement that environmental influences naturally include both activity and diet-related processes, and potential clustering of activity and diet (Kremers, 2010). We discuss the micro-environmental home setting parents create for their children by their own intake and the food parenting practices they use to socialize their children. We highlight distinctions and potential areas of overlap in literatures on parent–child dietary behavior and food parenting practices.

To the best of our knowledge, previous studies have not evaluated interactions between parental dietary behavior and food parenting practices, which refer to food-specific discrete, observable acts of parenting (Power, 2013; Power et al., 2013). One previous study reported an interaction between parental dietary behavior (i.e., fruit consumption) and the *general* parenting context in explaining adolescents' fruit consumption (Rodenburg, Oenema, Kremers, & van de Mheen, 2012). We propose that examining interactions between parental dietary behavior and food parenting practices may reveal important insights into how parents influence the home food environment and, subsequently, shape children's dietary behavior. These findings may direct the development of evidence-based child obesity preventive interventions.

Hence, the overarching aim of this review is to present the rationale for a new conceptual model that bridges a gap between the literature that considers how children's dietary intake is influenced by parents' own dietary behavior and the literature that examines the impact of food parenting practices. In our view, this conceptual model indicates the most important pathways for understanding children's dietary behavior related to overweight and obesity. It is important to note that this paper does not provide a systematic review of the literature. Instead, we provide an opinion-based review that addresses the pathways in the proposed conceptual model. Illustrative examples are included in the interest of stimulating research in potentially eminent interactive pathways. Our conceptual model mainly focuses on infants, preschoolers and school-aged children, as the shared environment appears to play a substantial role in determining their dietary behaviors (Hasselbalch, Heitmann, Kyvik, & Sorensen, 2008; Pimpin et al., 2013; Wardle & Cooke, 2008). However, in providing evidence for our model we also use literature among adolescents.

## Our conceptual model

Figure 1 summarizes our conceptual model describing parental influences on child's dietary behavior via their own dietary behavior and their food parenting practices. The model consists of three main hypotheses. First, parental dietary behavior and food parenting practices are important interactive sources of influence on children's dietary behavior and Body Mass Index (BMI). Second, parental influences are importantly mediated by changes in the child's home food environment. Third, parenting context (i.e., parenting styles and differential parental treatment) moderates effects of food



**Fig. 1.** Conceptual model of how parents influence their child's dietary behavior. Note: Dotted lines are moderating effects; thicker lines indicate most important effects

parenting practices, whereas child characteristics (i.e., temperament and appetitive traits) mainly moderate effects of the home food environment.

## Article outline

In the following section we present the rationale for our conceptual model (and first two hypotheses) by providing a broad overview of the literature on parental dietary behavior and food parenting practices. We discuss the mechanisms involved and potential interactive effects between parental dietary behavior and food parenting practices. Then, we discuss our third hypothesis pertaining to moderating influence of the parenting context (i.e., parenting styles and differential parental treatment) and child characteristics (i.e., temperament and appetitive traits). Finally, we end with conclusions and recommendations for future research.

## Parental dietary behavior and their food parenting practices: a broad literature review

According to some scholars, parents are responsible for structuring their children's food environment, the 'when', 'what', and 'how much' of food provided, while children should be allowed to determine 'how much' to eat of the food (portions) provided to them (Johnson, 2000; Satter, 1995). That young children are under certain conditions able to determine 'how much' they should eat follows from research demonstrating that infants and young children can modify their food intake in response to the energy content of food (Birch & Deysher, 1985, 1986; Spill, Birch, Roe, & Rolls, 2011), can learn to associate flavor cues with energy in foods (Birch & Deysher, 1985, 1986), and appear to have a relatively stable daily dietary behavior patterns, despite variations from meal to meal (Birch, Johnson, Andresen, Peters, & Schulte, 1991; Stein, Shea, & Basch, 1991). Whereas infants and young children are generally very good at self-regulating their energy intakes, they are thought to become more attuned to external signals as they develop (Mela, 2001), and parents may play an eminent role in this development. The apparent innate sensitivity to the energy content of the food may be disturbed when children are instructed by adults to focus on external instead of internal signals of hunger and satiety (Birch, McPhee, Shoba, Steinberg, & Krehbiel, 1987; Johnson, 2000). We propose that most detrimental parental effects are those that stimulate a high energy-dense food environment. Large portions of energy-dense food may promote excess consumption among children as young as 2 years of age (Fisher & Kral, 2008; Rolls, 2000). Moreover, exposure to a variety

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