



Research review

Parenting styles, feeding styles, and their influence on child obesogenic behaviors and body weight. A review



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ABSTRACT

With recommendations to include parents as targets for childhood obesity interventions, there is a need to review the relationship of general parenting influences on childhood obesity. Therefore, the aim of this review is to examine the existing literature regarding the influence of parenting style and/or feeding styles on childhood obesogenic behaviors and body weight. Research articles related to parenting style ($n = 40$) and parental feeding style ($n = 11$) were identified and reviewed. An authoritative style appears to be the most protective parenting and feeding style while the indulgent feeding style is consistently associated with negative health outcomes. Overall, results for parenting style studies are inconsistent due to differences in conceptualization and measurement, while the results for feeding styles are much more cohesive. The literature is lacking in the ability to describe the interplay between parenting and feeding styles and child obesity risk. Recommendations for future research and interventions are discussed in regards to feeding style and influences on childhood obesity.

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Introduction

Rates of childhood obesity have dramatically increased in the US over the past two decades with approximately 17% of children aged 2–19 years old considered obese (Ogden, Carroll, Curtin, Lamb, & Flegal, 2010). It is important to prevent and/or treat childhood obesity because obese children are more likely to show signs of chronic disease such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and breathing problems that continue into adulthood (Freedman, Mei, Srinivasan, Berenson, & Dietz, 2007; Han, Lawlor, & Kimm, 2010; Whitlock, Williams, Gold, Smith, & Shipman, 2005). Parents remain one of the most significant influences on child weight (Faith et al., 2012). Parent weight is one of the most robust and significant predictors of a child’s weight, although some evidence suggests that there is a gender-specific influence (Agras, Hammer, McNicholas, & Kraemer, 2004; Perez-Pastor et al., 2009). Aside from genetic influence, parents also shape the food and meal environment at home through feeding behaviors such as food availability and accessibility, timing and frequency of meals. (Silventoinen, Rokholm, Kaprio, & Sorensen, 2010).

To develop effective childhood obesity prevention programs, it is important to consider and understand the parent–child relationship and the impact of parenting style and/or feeding style on childhood obesogenic behaviors and body weight (Faith et al., 2012). Thus, the purpose of this review is to examine the literature evaluating the relationship between parenting style and feeding style on child weight status and obesogenic behaviors such as dietary intake (e.g. fruit and/or vegetable intake, sugar sweetened beverage intake, etc.), eating behaviors (e.g. disinhibited eating), family meal frequency, physical activity, and sedentary behaviors. For organizational purposes, parenting styles and feeding styles will be presented separately in the following sections and then comparisons between parenting and feeding styles as well as suggestions for future research will be presented in the discussion section.

Conceptualization and definition of parenting and feeding style typologies

Specific parenting behaviors and practices influence child development and are part of a broader parenting environment, called parenting style, conceptualized by Diana Baumrind (Baumrind, 1966; Baumrind, 1967; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Macoby and Martin (1983) provided a two-dimensional framework for parenting style by blending Baumrind’s typology with earlier definitions of parenting to develop linear responsiveness and demandingness dimensions (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

The demands a parent makes on a child to become part of the family or society and the parent’s response to noncompliant children is called demandingness (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Responsiveness refers to the parent’s awareness of his or her child’s needs and how they foster a child’s autonomy. Responsiveness also reflects how open a child is to a parent’s demand (Maccoby, 1992). Four parenting styles emerged from the linear break-up of responsiveness and demandingness (Macoby & Martin, 1983). Authoritative (high demandingness, high responsiveness)

parents have reasonable expectations for their child, foster child autonomy, respect the child’s opinion, and provide warmth (Maccoby, 1992). Authoritarian (high demandingness, low responsiveness) parents are not sensitive to the child’s opinion and place strict demands on their child without regard of the child’s ability or maturity (Maccoby, 1992). Permissive or indulgent (low demandingness, high responsiveness) parents do not enforce demands on their child but show respect for their child and provide warmth (Maccoby, 1992). Neglectful or uninvolved (low demandingness, low responsiveness) parents do not place demands on their child and are unaware of their child’s needs or opinions (Maccoby, 1992). It is important to note, however, that not all researchers adhere to the above typology, thus clouding the literature. Because researchers have a variety of parenting style measures to choose from, other parenting styles have been operationalized, measured, and implicated in the risk of child obesity such as with rejecting or nonauthoritative parenting styles. As parenting styles are discussed in the results section, comparisons will be made to the original four styles (authoritarian, authoritative, permissive/indulgent, neglectful/uninvolved) (Table 1).

Hughes, Power, Fisher, Mueller, and Nicklas (2005) differentiated between general parenting style and, parenting styles specific to feeding or eating interactions, known as feeding styles, with responsiveness and demandingness dimensions. In feeding styles, demandingness refers to the number of demands that a parent places on a child to get him/her to eat (Hughes et al., 2005). Responsiveness refers to the how demands are carried out by the parent, which can be either parent-centered or child-centered (Hughes et al., 2005). Based on these two dimensions, authoritative (high demandingness, high responsiveness), authoritarian (high demandingness, low responsiveness), indulgent (low demandingness, high responsiveness), and uninvolved (low demandingness, low responsiveness) feeding styles were identified (Table 1).

Due to confusion in the existing literature, it is important to take time to describe the differences between feeding styles and feeding practices as this review is only focused on the feeding style variable. Practices, such as restriction or pressure to eat, are goal directed behaviors and are defined by specific content such as restriction of certain foods or modeling eating behaviors and change in different contexts (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Styles, on the other hand, provide the emotional climate and are not goal directed and remain static in all contexts (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Practices help parents directly achieve child feeding and eating goals while the style alters the effectiveness of these practices (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

Table 1
Four major parenting/feeding styles based on responsiveness and demandingness.

Parenting/feeding style dimensions	Responsiveness	
	Low	High
Demandingness	Low	Neglectful/uninvolved
	High	Authoritative
		Permissive/indulgent
		Authoritative

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