



The Differences in Characteristics Among Households With and Without Obese Children: Findings From USDA's FoodAPS

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What Is the Issue?

Childhood obesity rates in the United States have more than doubled in the past three decades. As obese children tend to become obese adults with poor health and low socioeconomic status, a better understanding of factors that may lead to obesity at a young age will aid in the development of efforts to reverse this costly trend. This study examines characteristics and food environments of households with at least one obese child (obese-child households) and without any obese children (nonobese-child households) to identify potential factors that could explain high obesity rates among some children.

What Did the Study Find?

Children from obese-child households tend to live in a more disadvantageous environment than children from nonobese-child households:

- Children from obese-child households are more likely to live with parents who are not married, have lower education levels, are financially constrained, and are obese themselves.
- Obese-child households are typically located in areas with lower access to food outlets that sell healthful foods. In urban areas, obese-child households live in areas with easier access to and greater availability of convenience stores than nonobese-child households. Convenience stores typically sell nonperishable processed items. In rural areas, obese-child households live in areas with less availability of superstores and supermarkets than nonobese-child households. Superstores and supermarkets consistently sell healthful foods.

For obese- and nonobese-child households, most of the differences in eating patterns and the nutritional quality of food acquired from food outlets are not statistically significant:

- The number of times households eat dinner out or at home and the number of times children eat lunch, dinner, and snacks during the week are not different across the household types.
- Children from nonobese-child households, however, eat breakfast 5 percent more often than children from obese-child households.

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- The overall nutritional quality of acquired food is similar, except nonobese-child households acquire more seafood and plant proteins, particularly from food prepared away from home.
- Survey respondents from obese-child households rate their diet quality to be slightly higher than respondents do from nonobese-child households and cite high food prices and poor taste of healthful foods as barriers to eating better.

How Was the Study Conducted?

This study uses data from USDA's 2012 National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey (FoodAPS). FoodAPS is a nationally representative survey of food purchases and acquisitions by 4,826 households during a 1-week period between April 2012 and January 2013. The study provides weighted estimates of sample means for demographic characteristics, financial well-being, food environments, eating patterns, nutritional quality of acquired food, and attitudes toward healthy eating by the presence of an obese child in the households. It compares results for households with at least one obese child to those without an obese child and highlights statistically significant differences using t-tests.