











# Don't Be a Food Bully!

A recent study in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior discovered that worry over picky eating may prompt moms and dads to use non-responsive feeding practices like pressuring or rewarding for eating.

Lead author, Dr. Holly Harris of the Centre for Children's Health Research, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane Australia states, "These practices can reinforce fussy eating, increase preferences for unhealthy foods and lead to excessive weight gain." Finding out why parents use unproductive behaviors to deal with picky eaters is important in order to learn to teach healthy feeding practices. The research in this particular study included over 200 mothers and fathers with children aged 2-5 years from socio-economically disadvantaged communities in Queensland, Australia.

In the study, parents were asked about themselves as well as their perceived role in feeding as well as their child's mood. In addition, parents recorded the frequency of picky eating behavior and feeding habits. Parents also responded about how often they were concerned about their child's picky eating, their child not consuming a varied or balanced diet, and how much their child ate.

Researchers noted that mothers reported higher levels of concern, though both moms and dads accounts of picky eating were consistent. According to research, gender assumptions put more responsibility for feeding and a child's diet on mothers. Moms are more sensitive to children's verbal and nonverbal cues and are typically more distressed by crying, tantrums, and gagging when a child refuses food. Dads more often used persuasive feeding behaviors, though their practices were not necessarily born out of parental concern, said Dr. Harris.

Dr. Harris advises that when healthcare professionals educate parents about feeding picky eaters, they should provide reassurance, instruction, and different behavioral methods to improve children's exposure to a wide array of nutritious foods.