

Mealtimes

Findings from the Texas Child Feeding Study¹

How do TX parents prepare and serve food for their children?

Background

Food acceptance patterns are established at a young age.² Children who regularly eat meals in front of the television may consume more calories during meals.³

What did we ask?

- How often does your child eat a home-cooked main meal?
- How often does your child have a set mealtime and snack routine?
- Besides you, who else regularly fixes food for this child?
- How often do you plan your child's meal ahead of time?
- When deciding what to feed your family, how often do you think about healthy food choices?
- How important were the following things in choosing what to feed your child for his or her main meal – nutritional content, not wasting, convenience, availability in the home, and child preference?
- How often does your child watch TV during meals?

What did we learn?

General Observations

- In this sample, 76% of WIC respondents reported that their children (ages 1-5) eat a daily home-cooked meal, compared to 61% of low-income, non-WIC respondents and 43% of higher-income respondents. See Figure 1.
- About half (55%) of WIC respondents and 60% of low-income non-WIC respondents reported that their children often or always have a set mealtime and snack routine compared to 82% of higher-income respondents.
- Children's food is prepared by many people in addition to the mother, including the other parent, grandparents, schools and daycare centers. See Figure 2.
- 1 in 7 WIC respondents reported that their children (ages 1-5) prepare food for themselves.

Meal Planning

- 58% of respondents reported that they often or always plan their children's meals ahead of time.

Figure 1.
WHO EATS A DAILY HOME-COOKED MEAL?
n=721

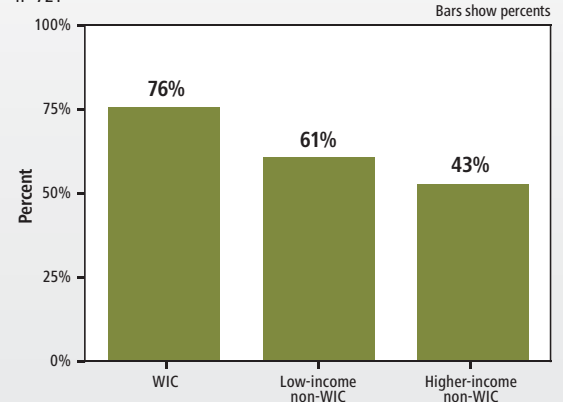
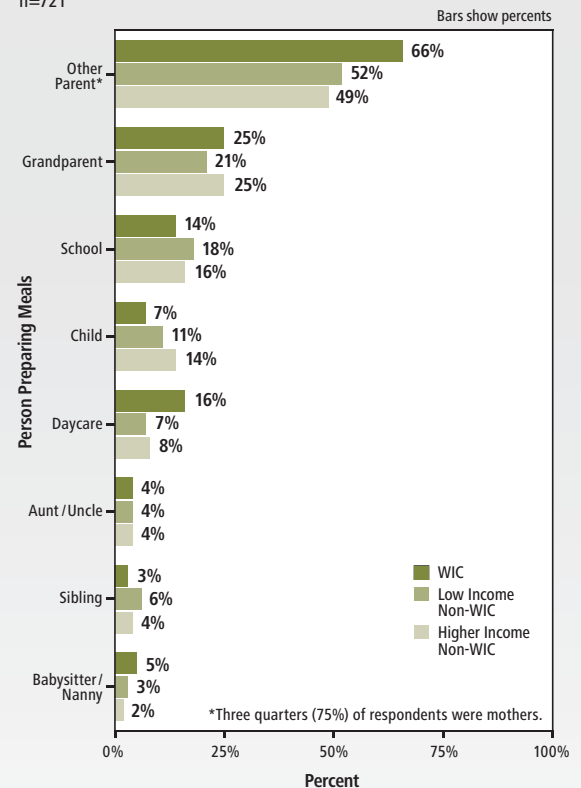


Figure 2.
WHO FEEDS THE CHILDREN?
n=721



Continues on back.



What did we learn? (continued)

Meal Planning (continued)

- 83% often or always “think about healthy food choices” when deciding what to feed the family.
- Respondents rate child preference as the most important factor in choosing what to feed children for their main meal, compared to availability in the home, convenience, not wanting to waste food and nutritional content. See Figure 3.
 - Convenience was less important to WIC clients than it was to low and higher income non-WIC families. There were no other differences based on WIC involvement or income level.
 - Child preference was more important to parents with children between the ages of 1 and 2 compared to those with children ages 2 and older.
 - There were no differences in the importance of the five factors by ethnicity, main language spoken at home, age or gender of the child.

Television and Mealtimes

- 47% of respondents report that their children watch TV during meals at least sometimes.
 - One year-olds were least likely to watch TV during meals.
- More than half of four and five year-olds ask for the food they see on TV. See Figure 4.

Implications for WIC Nutrition Educators

- Recognize that WIC clients do prepare home-cooked meals for their children and reinforce this as an opportunity to create a low cost, nutritious meal for their families.
- Provide ideas for low-cost meals, nutritious foods to keep on hand in the home and ways to use leftovers for later meals.
- Many people are involved in preparing food for children. WIC can target people beyond the individuals who come to the clinic.
- Child preferences develop through repeated exposure, taste, and modeling.
 - Reinforce the message that children may need to try a new food up to 15 times before they like it.
 - Encourage caregivers to provide the same foods for the whole family instead of separate foods for children and adults. Let everyone have a turn to pick his or her favorite dish.
- Help older children learn how to prepare healthy meals and snacks.
- Encourage parents to turn off the TV during meal times.

For more information about this study series, please visit:

www.dshs.state.tx.us/wichd/nut/riskreport-nut.shtm

Figure 3.
FOOD PREPARATION DECISION-MAKING FACTORS
n=721

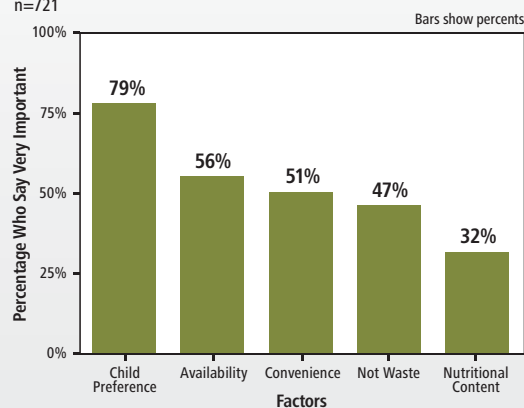
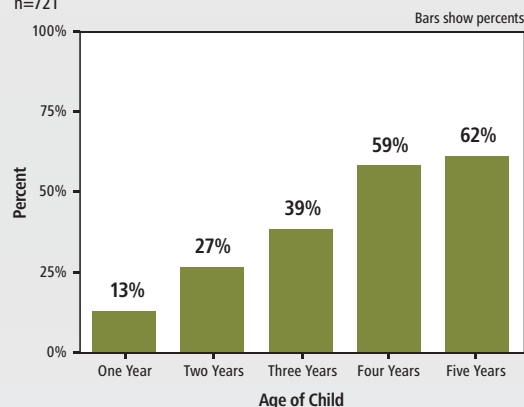


Figure 4.
PERCENT OF CHILDREN WHO ASK FOR THE FOOD
THEY SEE ON TV BY AGE OF CHILD
n=721



¹ Results from the Texas Child Feeding Study, conducted by the University of Texas at Austin Nutrition Education Team, in conjunction with the Texas Dept. of State Health Services. Seven hundred and twenty-one (721) Texas households were surveyed. Households had at least one child between the ages of 1 and 5 years and were grouped into the following categories: WIC households (n=241); low-income, non-WIC households (n=274); middle to high-income households (n=203). For more information on the study, contact Shellie Shores at: shellie.shores@dshs.state.tx.us.

² Birch, LL & Fisher, JO. Development of eating behaviors among children and Adolescents. *Pediatrics*. 1998; 101(3):539-49.

³ Francis, LA & Birch, LL. Does eating during television viewing affect preschool children's intake? *J Am Diet Assoc*. 2006; 106(4): 598-600.

