

Fast food children 'develop lower IQs': Junk diet has a lasting effect, warn experts

- **Lower socio-economic status linked to more children having fast food, leading to lower intelligence**

By [Lucy Osborne](#)

Children given more fast food meals will grow up to have a lower IQ than those who regularly eat freshly-cooked meals, according to a study.

Childhood nutrition has long lasting effects on IQ, even after previous intelligence and wealth and social status are taken into account, it found.

The study examined whether the type of main meal that children ate each day had an impact on their cognitive ability and growth.



Junk: Children who eat more fast food meals will have a lower IQ in the future

It looked at 4,000 Scottish children aged three to five years old and compared fast food with freshly-cooked food.

The study, undertaken by an academic at Goldsmiths, University of London, found that parents with a higher socio-economic status reported that they gave their children meals prepared with fresh ingredients more often, which positively affected their IQ.

Lower socio-economic status was linked to more children having fast food, which led to lower intelligence.

Dr Sophie von Stumm, from the department of psychology at Goldsmiths, said: 'It's common sense that the type of food we eat will affect brain development, but previous research has only looked at the effects of specific food groups on children's IQ rather than at generic types of meals.'

'This research will go some way to providing hard evidence to support the various high-profile campaigns aimed at reducing the amount of fast food consumed by children in the UK.'

Dr von Stumm said her findings highlighted that differences in children's meals were also a social problem. 'Mothers and fathers from less privileged backgrounds often have less time to prepare a freshly cooked meal from scratch for their children,' she said.



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'These children score lower on intelligence tests and often struggle in school.

'Schools in less privileged areas must do even more to balance children's diet, so that they can achieve their cognitive potential.

'It shows that the freshness and quality of food matters more than just being full, in particular when children are young and developing.'

Similar discoveries were made in an Australian study published in August. It found that while eating healthily can give a boost to intelligence, toddlers on a diet of drinks and sweets were less bright as they got older.

By the age of eight the 'junk food' children had IQs up to two points lower than their healthy counterparts, according to the researchers from the University of Adelaide.

And an American study, published in the Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health in 2010, showed that children who consume junk food such as pizza, chips and biscuits before the age of three may end up having lower IQs than children who ate home-cooked meals with fruit and vegetables.

These children were tested five years later and had IQ scores that were as much as five points lower than their healthier-eating peers.

The researchers suspected that the negative effect of eating junk food so early in life may not be altered by future healthy habits because brain development is hindered.

Insects have been found in healthy snack bars for toddlers carrying Disney character names and produced by the British child food guru Annabel Karmel.

Thousands of the bars have been removed from sale following the discovery of insect larvae that look like maggots.

The products involved are Annabel Karmel chewy bars, which are sold as an alternative to junk food snacks and carry images of Mickey Mouse to appeal to youngsters.

Child food guru: Annabel Karmel's Baby and Toddler Meal Planner has sold three million copies worldwide

Mrs Karmel has built a multi-million pound food empire from her ability to tap into the difficulties that parents have in getting children to eat healthily.

Her success stems from her book the Complete Baby and Toddler Meal Planner, first published 17 years ago, which has sold more than three million copies around the world.

To date, she has written 17 books on food and child nutrition, while her business has expanded to include baby products and, more recently, ready meals.

Read more: The vanishing fruit and veg: Warning of shortages and price rises as British crops are hit by bad weather

Supermarkets are warning of shortages of British fruit and vegetables and higher prices after the recent torrential rain left fields waterlogged.

Retailers are struggling to keep shelves stocked, and some are putting up signs apologising for the fact that their produce is not up to normal standards.

Yesterday, Sainsbury's and Tesco predicted a shortage of home-grown potatoes, parsnips and carrots in the run-up to Christmas.

Warning: Supermarkets predict a shortage of fruit and vegetables, including home-grown potatoes, parsnips, and carrots, in the run-up to Christmas

Crops of sprouts are down by 20 or 30 per cent, while there will be fewer pumpkins for Halloween. Crops of broccoli, cabbages, cauliflower and swede are all expected to be smaller.

Stores say they will be forced to import more vegetables, which will inevitably drive up prices at a time when the nation is suffering the biggest cost of living squeeze in at least 60 years.

The lack of supply has led to big price rises for potatoes, with the wholesale cost up by as much as 25 per cent on a year ago.

Wheat harvests have also been hit with the result that millers are importing more grain, which will push up the cost of bread and pasta.

The dire weather in recent weeks has made the harvesting of vegetables in places such as Scotland virtually impossible, creating the risk that crops will rot in the ground.

Fruit growers have also suffered. The British apple crop was three weeks late this year and down by 25 per cent to around 70,000 tons. Many apples were damaged.

The situation means that most stores have been forced to relax their 'beauty pageant' standards for fresh fruit and vegetables.

Tesco, which as the UK's biggest supermarket has massive buying power, is struggling to get hold of sufficient supplies of good-quality produce

Sainsbury's chief executive said the chain will have to shift to more expensive imports

As a result, shoppers are seeing more 'ugly' produce which is smaller with skin blemishes, lumps and bumps on the shelves.

Sainsbury's chief executive Justin King said there will be a shortage of British vegetables in the run-up to Christmas and that the chain will have to shift to more expensive imports.

'Inflation is coming back up,' he said. 'The weather across the summer, especially in the early part of the season, meant it was difficult to plant crops, so potatoes, parsnips and carrots are all under pressure and the wheat crop is down.

'We will have to source ours from different places – and move abroad for the first time. We will also see a rise in uglier products.'

Even Tesco, which as the UK's biggest supermarket has massive buying power, is struggling to get hold of sufficient supplies of good-quality produce.

The company has decided to put up signs in stores to alert shoppers to the problems. One warns: 'Our tomatoes and peppers are struggling with the weather. You may find that the quality is not up to our usual standard.'

Matthew Rawson, chairman of the Brassica Growers Association, said: 'The main growing areas – Lincolnshire, Scotland and Cornwall – along with important supporting locations have seen record levels of rainfall, vastly reduced sunlight hours and cold temperatures.

'A common theme has been waterlogged conditions leading to crops developing poor root systems. Some areas have witnessed "rotting off".'