

# The Washington Times

[www.washingtontimes.com](http://www.washingtontimes.com)

---

## THE WASHINGTON TIMES

### Fat and snack trap

By Karen Goldberg Goff  
Published March 18, 2007

---

Ah, the good old days, when a stocked pantry meant Diet Coke and energy bars, and the needle on the scale never budged.

To thousands of today's parents, life is now about Lunchables and Happy Meals, slices of pizza and candy kept around for bribes. Life moves too fast to slow down enough and count every gram of trans fat.

However, the amount of fat parents consume is moving fast, too, says a recent study. Adults living with children consume more fat -- the equivalent of a 6-inch pepperoni pizza every week -- than adults who do not live with children, say doctors at the University of Iowa and University of Michigan.

The study of more than 6,600 adults found that adults living with children ate 91.4 grams of total fat a day -- about 4.9 grams more than those without children in the home. Of that total fat, adults with children ate more saturated fat -- 29.9 grams a day compared with 28.2 grams for those without children.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends that adults keep their total fat intake between 20 percent and 35 percent of total calories, and saturated fat -- the kind found in many dairy products, meat and processed foods -- below 10 percent of total calories.

For an adult who eats about 2,000 calories a day, that means total fat should be about 78 grams (about 700 calories) or less, with 20 grams (about 180 calories) or less of the total saturated fat.

In the study, both groups of adults ate more than 2,000 calories a day. The adults with children obtained 35 percent of their calories from fat, 11.5 percent from saturated fat. The subjects without children took 34 percent of calories from fat, with 11 percent of the calories from saturated fat.

The study's authors said adults with children younger than 17 tend to eat the food that is brought into the house "for the kids."

"The study looked at adults with kids and adults living without kids," says Dr. Helena Laroche, a University of Iowa physician and the lead author of the study. "We found that the adults with kids were eating more fat. The study doesn't tell us why they are consuming more fat -- but it hints at it."

Researchers asked the subjects how often they ate foods such as beef, cheese, pizza and salty snacks. Pretty often, the research found. Those adults also had "significantly higher odds of eating" bacon, milk, sausage, processed meats, peanuts, ice cream, cookies and cake.

What? No Gummi Bears category?

"A lot of parents are eating convenience food," Dr. Laroche says. "Whether they buy it for the kids to eat or the kids are bringing it into the house, it may be a combination of factors."

It is sort of a vicious circle of bad food choices for the families with children. Marketers appeal to children. Children badger parents. The high-fat food gets into the house. The food eventually finds its way into the mouths of parents.

Even things that aren't junk food on the surface are there for the children.

"What am I supposed to do? Buy fat-free cream cheese?" says Karen Leder, a mother of three from Bethesda. "They are not going to eat that."

Adding to the problem is the large number of parents with good intentions of making it through the day with whole-wheat bread, salad, fish and other adult-approved and heart-healthy food.

Then there is the crust of frozen waffle that Junior left on his plate. Later, it is a quarter of a peanut-butter sandwich, half an ice cream bar and an Oreo. Oops, there are 10 McDonald's french fries left in the bag, so Mom will just eat a couple -- OK, all -- of them.

Before the day is done, that is an additional couple of hundred calories -- enough to add more than 10 pounds a year -- that aren't officially counted, says **Lisa Young**, adjunct professor of nutrition at New York University and author of the book "*The Portion Teller*."

"I think we underestimate that bites, nibbles and broken pieces have calories," Ms. **Young** says. "It is important to realize you are going to want a treat. If you use your kids' food as a treat, you've got to build it in [to the daily caloric intake] or not have it."

Mrs. Leder has tried it both ways.

"I was literally eating my whole meal and another meal of my kids' leftovers," she says. "So I have been on diets where I ate only my kids' scraps all day, or I ate none of their scraps. I found I could lose weight on both of them. I think I lost about two pounds eating nothing but the rest of their food when they were little."

Eating the rest of the children's food is a problem for many of Ms. **Young's** clients.

"They find they are eating a 'little dinner' with the kids, then eating again," she says. "Sometimes they are just picking, as far as they are concerned, but they are eating more than they think."

One strategy Ms. **Young** offers to her clients: Eat appropriate food when you are hungry. That way, you won't be starving when you pick the children up and take them for pizza and you won't eat pizza.

"I see it all the time," she says. "Moms with kids who are overwhelmed and do not take time for themselves. You have to build in time where you can have fruit, vegetables or yogurt."

The solution is not to ban all junk from the household, says Barbara Rolls, professor of nutritional sciences at Penn State University and author of "The Volumetrics Eating Plan: Techniques for Feeling Full on Fewer Calories."

"If you restrict access, it becomes more desired," she says. "You can have things like chocolate and not make a big deal about making them so special that the kids are thinking about it. You shouldn't reward them with foods you don't want them to eat."

Ms. Rolls says that studies have shown that if you take a moderately nutritious food and offer it as a reward, then that food will go up in preference.

In the end, you want to teach self- and portion-control to the children, not make cupcakes enticing and mysterious contraband.

Buying chips and ice cream in individual portions is a good strategy, too, Ms. **Young** says. With a smaller portion, Junior is more likely to finish his snack, so there won't be a handful of leftover chips for parents to grab. If parents give in, their single-serving portion is already measured out for them, she says. Single-serving packs usually have on the package exactly how many calories and fat grams are in it.

"A single-serving pack forces you to take ownership," she says.