

Authors B. EGAN¹, B. BRANDS², E.GYÖREL³, JC LÓPEZ-ROBLES⁴ ·H. GAGE¹, M. RAATS¹, B KOLETZKO², T DESC³, and C. CAMPOY⁴,

Organisation(s) ¹Food Consumer Behaviour and Health Research Centre, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7XH, ² Dr. von Hauner Children's Hospital, Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich, Germany, ³ Department of Paediatrics, University of Pécs, Hungary, ⁴ Department of Paediatrics University of Granada, Spain.

Abstract: No more than 300 words

The role of diet in the mental performance of children- what do parents think?

Nutrition plays an important role in a child's development, including their mental performance. Ideally children should have a healthy, balanced diet as mental performance may be influenced by the nature of children's diets and the pattern of meal consumption.

Parents play a pivotal role in the establishment of children's food choices and eating habits however to date there is little published research on parent's perceptions of the effect of diet on children's' mental performance. The present qualitative study was conducted in four European countries, England, Germany, Hungary and Spain and participants were parents of children aged 4-10 years who were recruited through schools in the state sector. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to elicit parent's views on the effect of food on children's wellbeing and development in general and more specifically the mental effects of food. Additional questions addressed the possible effects of specific foods, meals and supplements as well as the impact of what children eat in school on their performance. Interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed using NVivo8.

The principal themes to emerge across the four countries included the effects of diet in terms of physical, mental and behavioural outcomes. A healthy balanced diet was perceived to have positive effects whereas foods with high sugar and/or fat content were perceived to have negative effects. Parents most often mentioned attention and concentration as the aspects of mental performance affected by particular foods. Parents also referred to tangible effects of foods being manifested by changes in a child's mood and behaviour. Establishing good eating habits in childhood was perceived as important as these habits would continue into adult life, with possible long-term effects on health.