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Mother really DOES know best: Children who eat lunch at home 'at lower risk of obesity'

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Children who have their meals at home enjoy a healthier diet and are at lower risk from obesity than their peers, researchers say.

A study from the University of Granada found a direct link between who prepared a child's lunch and how healthy they were.

Writing in the journal *Nutricion hospitalaria*, the authors said: 'The mother is the family member who best knows the nutritional needs of children and has the strongest nutritional knowledge for the preparation of children's meals.'



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The healthiest option: Research has found that children who eat lunch at home enjoy a healthier diet and are at lower risk of obesity

The findings come amid an ongoing campaign for healthier meals in UK schools, which TV chef Jamie Oliver has championed since 2005.

Since 2006 schools have had to provide meals that meet national nutritional standards. These require high-quality meat or oily fish featuring regularly on the menu and two portions of fruit and veg with every meal. Deep-fried food has been limited to no more than two portions per week.

At the end of 2011 Mr Oliver raised concerns about the quality of meals in some academy schools, which are not obliged to adhere to the national standards.

The School Food Trust has been examining the quality of meals in state-funded but privately-run schools and will release a report on its findings later this month.

In the Granada study researchers analysed 718 children aged between 9-17 years from 13 different schools, and assessed each child's family environment, exercise habits and how often they ate certain foods.

They then measured their weight, size and body mass index (BMI).

The research found a clear link between sedentary hobbies and high BMI, meaning that the more time a child devoted to watching TV, playing video games and surfing the internet, the more likely they were to be obese.

The team concluded that it is 'extremely important' for families to pass healthy habits on to their children, especially a love of exercise.

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