Association Between Young Adults’ and their Parents’ Daily Caloric Intake
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Introduction: Diet and weight of both children and adults are a national concern (USDHHS, 2000, 2011). Current literature suggests that children are subject to their parents’ dietary behaviors while living in the same household (Haire-Joshu et al., 2008; Talpade, 2008). Also, parenting authority styles have been associated with dietary patterns, weight statuses, and disordered eating in children (Arehart-Treichel, 2007; Enten & Golan, 2009; Pearson, Atkin, Biddle, Gorely, & Edwardson, 2010). Dietary habits in youth typically persist into adulthood (Yancey & Kumanyika, 2007); however, current studies do not examine the relationships of dietary behaviors of parents and their adult children who no longer live in the same household. Such research is needed to understand whether there are long-term effects of parents’ dietary behaviors on their children’s development of dietary behaviors.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to further investigate:

- the direct relationship between parents’ and their young adult children’s dietary behaviors
- the relationship of parents’ and their young adult children’s BMI’s
- whether parenting authority styles influence the relationships

Methods: After providing informed consent, young adults (18 to 25 y, M=19.1; N=151) and their parents (36 to 64 y, M=48.5) completed the Block Brief Food Frequency Questionnaire. The young adult participants also completed the Parental Authority Questionnaire. Average daily caloric intakes and BMI’s were calculated, and correlation analyses were conducted (p<0.001). Additionally, a multiple regression analysis was performed to examine interaction effects of parenting authority styles.

Results: A moderate positive correlation existed between caloric intake (r=0.45, p<0.001) and BMI’s (r=0.31, p<0.001) of parents and their young adult children. Authoritarian parenting moderated the relationship of parents’ and their young adult children’s caloric intake (p<0.001; please see chart), and the relationship of BMI’s was similarly moderated by both authoritarian (p=0.012) and permissive parenting (p=0.010).

Limitations: Outliers were present in the study data. Removal of outliers resulted in nonsignificant findings; however, justification for excluding outliers simply did not exist. Therefore, it should be noted that outliers that skew the data toward significant findings are present in this study.

Conclusions: This study provides evidence that parents’ daily caloric intakes and BMI’s are associated with and help predict their young adult children’s daily caloric intakes and BMI’s, respectively. As levels of authoritarian parenting increase, however, the relationships become inverse. Also, as levels of permissive parenting increase, the relationship of BMI’s becomes inverse. This study helps illustrate that continued research of parental behaviors could be key to understanding fundamental influences of weight-related health behavior development.