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Children whose parents are anxious or depressed 'more likely to become fussy eaters';   
New study says the problem could begin before the children are even born  
  
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Children whose parents are anxious or depressed are more likely to become fussy eaters, in a problem which could begin before they are even born, according to a major new study.

Researchers discovered a clear link between the mental wellbeing of mothers and fathers and the attitudes of young children to food. Three and four year olds were at greater risk of becoming a fussy eater if their parents had suffered **anxiety** or **depression**, they found.

The refusal of children to eat certain foods, resulting in a restricted diet, causes major concerns among parents and has been linked to weight issues and behavioural problems in children, according to the study, published in the Archives of Disease in Childhood.

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Children who are fussy eaters may be depressed, say scientists

It was led by a team of researchers based at the Erasmus MC-University Medical Center, Rotterdam, who examined the **eating** habits of more than 4,700 children born in the Netherlands between 2002 and 2006 and the mental health of parents.

Parents completed questionnaires to assess their levels of **anxiety** and **depression** during mid-pregnancy and again when their **child** was three years old. They also reported on their children's**eating** patterns at the ages of three and four. Around 30 per cent of the children were classified as fussy eaters by the age of three.

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"We observed that maternal and paternal internalising problems were prospectively associated with**fussy** **eating** in pre-schoolers," the researchers said. "Clinicians should be aware that not only severe**anxiety** and **depression**, but also milder forms of internalising problems can affect **child eating**behaviour," they stated.

A finding that symptoms of women during pregnancy predicted **fussy** **eating** in their four-year-old children, independent of whether mothers had symptoms when their **child** was aged three, "strongly suggests that the direction of the associations with mothers' antenatal symptoms is from mother to**child.**"

In contrast, links between the **anxiety** of fathers with the way their children refuse foods can be explained by parenting factors, according to the researchers. "Possibly, fathers' **anxiety** affects children's **fussy** **eating** by controlling feeding practices such as pressure to eat. Such feeding practices could have counterproductive effects by contributing to negative affective reactions to food," they said.

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