Depressed mums and dads could turn their kids into fussy eaters, warn researchers

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* **BY** [ANDREW GREGORY](http://www.mirror.co.uk/authors/andrew-gregory/)

Experts studied nearly 5,000 youngsters and found that 30% had become picky about their food by the age of three

Children are more likely to be fussy eaters if their parents are [anxious or depressed](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/mental-health), experts have found.

Youngsters face a higher risk of becoming a picky eater if either of their parents show signs of these “internalising problems”, researchers said.

The problem has been linked children having weight issues and behavioural problems.

Dutch researchers studied almost 5,000 children born between 2002 and 2006 and their mums and dads.

Parents completed questionnaires to assess their levels of anxiety and depression [mid-pregnancy](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/pregnancy) and again when their child was three years old.

Mums completed a separate questionnaire on childhood eating patterns.

Toddlers who reject their food can be a great source of worry for parents with almost a third of youngsters consistently refusing to eat certain food.

The study, published in the Archives of Disease in Childhood, found that by the age of three, 30% of children were deemed to be fussy eaters.

Mums who showed anxiety symptoms during pregnancy and during the preschool period were more likely to have four-year-olds who were fussy eaters, the researchers found.

Each additional point the scored on the anxiety scale was associated with an extra point on the food fussiness scale.

Dads’ anxiety in the preschool period, but not during the antenatal period, was related to fussy eating in their child, they added.

Meanwhile depressive symptoms in both parents during pregnancy and three years later were also linked to fussy eating in children, they found. The researchers did not find out what precisely was behind the link.

They wrote: “We observed that maternal and paternal internalising problems were prospectively associated with fussy eating in pre-schoolers.

“For effective prevention and management of children’s fussy eating, the role of parents’ internalising problems should be considered.

“Clinicians should be aware that not only severe anxiety and depression, but also milder forms of internalising problems can affect child eating behaviour.”