

# TIMELY PARENTING RESEARCH:

## The Lowdown on Diet, Toys and Stay-at-Home Parents

What does the latest research say about the diet of U.S. children, the best toys for kids' development and what adults really think about working versus staying at home to raise a family? Take a look:



### DIET

In a study recently published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, researchers from Brown University found a marked improvement in the diet of U.S. children between 1999 and 2012. However, their overall diet still remains poor, the scientists note.

The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) examined the diet quality of more than 38,000 kids ages 2 to 18 and found that, in general, their nutrition is steadily improving. However, *what* they eat is still far from ideal, and disparities persist by income, race and receipt of government food assistance.

In fact, many of the components measured in the study's Healthy Eating Index improved significantly, such as children's eating more healthy foods (like whole fruit) and decreasing their consumption of empty calories (like sugary drinks). Sodium consumption, however, worsened.

"I am encouraged by the gains," says study lead author Xiao Gu, a master's student in epidemiology in the Brown University School of Public Health. "Although we showed several components still need to be improved...our paper provides evidence that we are on the correct track."



### TOYS

Trendy electronic gadgets pull kids in and dazzle them like a magician, but according to the latest toy research, back-to-basics toys are better.

In an online article recently published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, researcher Jeffrey Trawick-Smith points out that simple, open-ended toys provide a variety of opportunities for flexible, imaginative play. Trawick-Smith, professor of early childhood education at the Center for Early Childhood Education at Eastern Connecticut State University, Willimantic, CT, offers a few best bets for kids: hardwood blocks, a set of wooden vehicles and road signs, and classic wooden construction toys.

"The most important finding emerging from our studies is that different toys impact children's behavior in different ways," says Trawick-Smith. "Some toys have a powerful influence on children's thinking, interaction with peers and creative expression. Other toys do not. Some of the toys that look most interesting to adults are not particularly effective in promoting development."



### STAY-AT-HOME PARENTS

Even though women have been flooding into the workforce for decades, a recent survey from the Pew Research Center notes that most Americans think children with two parents fare better when one of them (not necessarily the mom) stays home to take care of the family.

In 46 percent of two-parent households in the United States today, both parents work full time, compared to just 31 percent employed full time among two-parent households in 1970.

Among the 59 percent of U.S. adults who think children are better off with a stay-at-home parent, about half say it doesn't matter whether Mom or Dad foregoes a career to raise a family. Who is more likely to think one parent should stay at home? Men, older Americans, Hispanics and adults with a high school education or less.

*Lisa Beach is a freelance journalist, copywriter and humor blogger. Check out her writer's website at [LisaBeachWrites.com](http://LisaBeachWrites.com) and visit her humor blog at [TweeniorMoments.com](http://TweeniorMoments.com).*

*As always, please consult your health care provider with any questions or concerns.*