

Cooked food may have given humans evolutionary edge in intelligence

The human brain is an exceptionally hungry organ—an energy-guzzling appliance if ever there was one. As you sit still and read this article, your brain is consuming about 20% of your calories. Four-year-old children have the hungriest brains of all. [A 2014 paper in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#) by Christopher Kuzawa at Northwestern University and colleagues found that when 4-year-olds sit still, 66% of their energy goes to fuel all those neurons.

Four-year-olds can't find food for themselves, and even hunter-gatherer mothers wean their babies by the time they are around 2. So where did all those calories come from in our evolutionary past? One answer is "cooperative breeding": Human fathers, older siblings and, especially, grandmothers helped feed those hungry preschoolers.

Cooking food also helps solve the supply problem. Cooking releases more energy and makes food easier to digest, especially for children. The biologist Richard Wrangham at Harvard has suggested that our human mastery of cooked food allowed us to grow those big, smart brains.

[In a new paper in the Proceedings of the Royal Society](#), Felix Warneken and Alexandra Rosati at Harvard explored whether those abilities might have been in place in our primate ancestors. The scientists introduced semiwild chimpanzees in the Congo to a "cooking box." The chimps watched the researchers place a raw slice of potato in the box, close it and then pull out a roasted slice—a sort of chimp Tater Tot. As a control, the scientists showed the chimps another box, put a raw slice in and then took it out uncooked.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: [Cooking Has a Place in Human Evolution](#)