

UC San Diego Researchers Study Adolescent Obesity and Weight Loss

December 07, 2009 |

W *hy are some successful, some not?*

In a study published in the December 2009 issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, researchers from UC San Diego School of Medicine identified overweight adolescents who successfully lost weight, and overweight adolescents who did not, and compared the two groups on weight control behaviors, dietary intake and physical activity to determine which strategies are effective.

“Our findings provide a glimpse of optimism that adolescents can lose a significant amount of weight and maintain this weight loss,” said Kerri Boutelle, PhD, associate professor in UCSD’s Departments of Pediatrics and Psychiatry and at Rady Children’s Hospital-San Diego. “Second, our findings suggest that there are no magical solutions, but that behaviors such as eating more fruits and vegetables, eating less fat and decreasing sedentary time seem to offer the most promise for success.”

Adolescent obesity is a major public health problem that impacts one out of every three youth, resulting in four to five million overweight youth in the United States. Research shows that one of the strongest predictors of adult obesity is adolescent obesity, with 70 percent of obese adolescents becoming obese adults. Findings from this study have the potential to guide both future research studies and clinical interventions for obesity in adolescents.

Boutelle and co-authors surveyed 130 adolescents, 62 of whom had been successful in losing weight and 68 who had not. Questioning adolescents and their parents, the authors evaluated weight control strategies, sedentary behaviors, dietary intake, physical activity, weighing frequency and current weight status.

The successful adolescents reported increased exercise levels, drinking less soda, walking more, climbing stairs and self-weighing. Overall, a higher percentage of adolescents who lost weight reported using six or more healthy weight control behaviors compared to those who did not lose weight. Fewer of the adolescents who lost weight reported using any of the structured behavior strategies that were assessed.

“Self-weighing may be a helpful monitoring tool for overweight adolescents,” explained Boutelle. “In the current study, the largest percentage of adolescents who lost weight reported weighing themselves on a weekly basis, while the largest percentage of adolescents who did not lose weight reported weighing themselves less than monthly. Last, the group that lost weight did not report using unhealthy weight control behaviors. Adolescents would benefit from hearing this information from dietitians and other health care providers to prevent development of unhealthy weight control behaviors in overweight teens.”

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Full text of the article – “Weight control strategies of overweight adolescents who successfully lost weight” – is available upon request Contact Lynelle Korte at 314-447-9227 or jadamedia@elsevier.com

UC San Diego School of Medicine

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