

March 14, 2012 | By Debra Kain

How to Best Help Your Child Lose Weight: Lose Weight Yourself

A study by researchers at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine and The University of Minnesota indicates that a parent's weight change is a key contributor to the success of a child's weight loss in family-based treatment of childhood obesity. The results were published today in the advanced online edition of the journal *Obesity*.

"We looked at things such as parenting skills and styles, or changing the home food environment, and how they impacted a child's weight," said Kerri N. Boutelle, PhD, associate professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at UC San Diego and Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego. "The number one way in which parents can help an obese child lose weight? Lose weight themselves. In this study, it was the most important predictor of child weight loss."

Recent data suggests that 31 percent of children in the United States are overweight or obese, or between four and five million children. Current treatment programs generally require participation by both parents and children in a plan that combines nutrition education and exercise with behavior therapy techniques.

"Parents are the most significant people in a child's environment, serving as the first and most important teachers," said Boutelle. "They play a significant role in any weight-loss program for children, and this study confirms the importance of their example in establishing healthy eating and exercise behaviors for their kids."

The researchers looked at eighty parent-child groups with an 8 to 12-year-old overweight or obese child, who participated in a parent-only or parent + child treatment program for five months.

The study focused on evaluating the impact of three types of parenting skills taught in family-based behavioral treatment for childhood obesity, and the impact of each on the child's body weight: the parent modeling behaviors to promote their own weight loss, changes in home food environment, and parenting style and techniques (for example, a parent's ability to help limit the child's eating behavior, encouraging the child and participating in program activities).

Consistent with previously published research, parent BMI change was the only significant predictor of child's weight loss.

The researchers concluded that clinicians should focus on encouraging parents to lose weight to help their overweight or obese child in weight management.

For more information about weight loss programs for children and adolescents at UC San Diego, visit www.obesitytreatment.ucsd.edu or email Kidsweight@ucsd.edu.

Additional contributors to the study include Guy Cafri, UCSD Child and Adolescent Services Research Center, and Scott J. Crown, University of Minnesota.

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