

Less television and more gathering around the dinner table prevents

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Sitting down to a family meal more often and cutting down on television watching can help keep children from becoming overweight, according to a new University of Missouri-Columbia study.

After following 8,000 children from kindergarten to third grade, researchers concluded that kids who watched the most TV were at the greatest risk of being or becoming overweight. Children who ate fewer meals with their families also were at risk for becoming overweight.

"Other research has shown that children who eat meals with their families eat more healthy foods than children who don't eat as many meals with their families," said Sara Gable, associate professor of human development and family studies in the MU College of Human Environmental Studies. "I suspect there are other benefits of family meal times that protect children from developing some of the habits that could lead to weight problems."

The researchers grouped children into three categories to determine the factors associated with becoming overweight: children who were not overweight during kindergarten and first grade but were overweight by the third grade; children who became overweight during kindergarten and stayed that way through the third grade; children who were never overweight.

"Children who were never overweight between kindergarten and third grade were watching, as per parent reports, roughly two hours of

television per day, or about 14 hours during a typical week," Gable said. "The children who were persistently overweight were watching about 16 hours of television per week."

Members of the persistently overweight groups also lived in neighborhoods that parents perceived as less safe for outdoor play.

"These results suggest that some overweight children have fewer options for active play when they are at home," Gable said.

Source: University of Missouri-Columbia

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