

Poor coordination in childhood is linked to obesity in later life

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Poor physical control and coordination in childhood are linked to an increased risk of obesity in later life, suggests a study published on BMJ.com today.

The research contributes to a growing body of evidence on the link between poorer cognitive function in childhood and obesity and type 2 diabetes in adults.

The findings are based on 11 042 individuals, who are part of the ongoing National Child Development Study in Great Britain, which began in 1958.

7990 participants were assessed by teachers at age 7 years to identify poor ability in hand control, coordination, and clumsiness, and 6875 were tested for hand control and coordination at age 11 by a doctor. Tests included copying a simple design to measure accuracy, marking squares on paper within a minute, and the time in seconds it took to pick up 20 matches.

At age 33 body mass index (BMI) was measured. Obesity was defined as a BMI of 30 or over.

The analysis showed that at age 7 years poor hand control, poor coordination, and clumsiness occurred more often among individuals who would be obese adults. In addition, poorer function at age 11 was associated with obesity at age 33.

These findings held true after adjusting for factors likely to influence the results, such as childhood body mass and family social class.

The study did not look at the specific biological processes linking poorer physical control and coordination in childhood with later obesity.

"Some early life exposures [such as maternal smoking during pregnancy] or personal characteristics may impair the development of physical control and coordination, as well as increasing the risk of obesity in later life", say the authors.

"Rather than being explained by a single factor, an accumulation throughout life of many associated cultural, personal, and economic exposures is likely to underlie the risks for obesity and some elements of associated neurological function", they conclude.

Source: British Medical Journal

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