

# Psychotherapy offers obesity prevention for 'at risk' teenage girls

December 15 2009

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A team of scientists at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and the National Institutes of Health have piloted psychotherapy treatment to prevent excessive weight gain in teenager girls deemed 'at risk' for obesity. The study, published in the *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, found that girls who participated in Interpersonal Psychotherapy may be better able to prevent their BMI from increasing over the course of a year compared to girls who took traditional health education classes.

The research team, led by Dr. Marian Tanofsky-Kraff, aimed to target youth considered at high-risk of obesity because they were already above average weight and because they reported episodes of loss of control eating or binge eating. Both higher weight and loss of control eating are linked to excessive weight gain in children and young people.

Interpersonal Psychotherapy (IPT) focuses on improving interpersonal relationships by targeting the underlying social and interpersonal difficulties that influence individuals to engage in loss of control eating. The therapy has been shown to help both depressed adults and youth and, also to help tackle binge eating in adults. In adult studies, decreases in binge eating may lead to modest weight loss and less regain over time compared with those who continue to binge eat. Thus, decreasing binge eating is an attractive target for preventing obesity in at-risk youth.

"We conducted this study to address the dramatically increased rates of obesity in children and adolescents," said Tanofsky-Kraff. "IPT for

Binge Eating Disorder is based on the assumption that binge eating occurs in response to poor social functioning and the consequent negative moods."

Thirty-eight [girls](#), some with and others without loss of control eating, were selected for the trial, and were randomly designated to attend either IPT sessions or standard health education classes currently taught to teenagers. All the girls completed their courses and received follow up visits for the next year.

Girls who undertook IPT were more likely to stabilize or reduce their BMI than those who received the health education classes. BMI is a measure of body weight corrected for height, and is used to determine appropriate weight gain in growing children and teens.

"This pilot study has demonstrated that IPT is both feasible and acceptable to adolescent girls at risk of adult obesity and suggests that it may prevent excess weight gain," concludes Tanofsky-Kraff. "If IPT proves to be effective, we may be able to prevent not only excessive [weight gain](#), but the development of related adverse health conditions in a subset of susceptible youth."

Provided by Wiley-Blackwell

Citation: Psychotherapy offers obesity prevention for 'at risk' teenage girls (2009, December 15) retrieved 10 August 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-12-psychotherapy-obesity-teenage-girls.html>

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