

New study shows effectiveness of MEND program in prevention and treatment of pediatric obesity

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Ground-breaking results from a study to evaluate the effectiveness of the MEND Program (Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do it!), a multi-component community-based childhood obesity intervention, are published today in the US journal *Obesity*. The results coincide with the launch of Michelle Obama's initiative to reduce childhood obesity announced in the State of the Union speech.

The independent study conducted by a team at University College London Institute of Child Health (ICH) demonstrates the success of the weight management program MEND for overweight and obese children and their families. The MEND Program supports recent international recommendations calling for [pediatric obesity](#) programs to involve the whole family and include nutrition education, behavior modification and promotion of physical activity.

116 children aged between 8 and 12 years took part in the study, which involved attending a nine week MEND program, followed by the provision of 12 weeks of free family swimming between January 2005 and January 2007. All lost weight, lowered their BMI ([Body Mass Index](#)) and waist circumference, and improved their self esteem and physical activity levels. Their general health, including cardiovascular fitness, also improved.

Participants were randomly assigned to start the program immediately

(intervention group), or receive the intervention six months later (control group). [Waist circumference](#), BMI, [body composition](#), physical activity level, sedentary activities, cardiovascular fitness and self esteem were assessed at baseline, and again at six and 12 months. All measures improved at six months and were sustained at 12 months. A key strength of the MEND Program was its acceptability to families—all the children who started the program completed it.

The MEND Program is now being piloted and made available in the United States through the MEND Foundation, a non-profit organization whose mission it is to serve low-income children in underserved communities through public-private partnerships.

Harry MacMillan, chief executive of MEND, said, "The MEND Program isn't a miracle pill for [obesity](#), but what this independent study does show is that child weight management programs that involve the whole family, like the MEND Program, are a scientifically-proven and sustainable solution to the child obesity crisis. People are starting to wake up to the fact that quick fixes don't work. These research findings prove that teaching children how to keep fit and eat healthily, like we do on the MEND Program, does work if done in the right way. With more funding, MEND could significantly reduce the number of overweight and obese children."

Professor Atul Singhal, pediatrician and head of clinical trials in the Childhood Nutrition Research Centre at University College London Institute of Child Health (ICH), said, "These results suggest that the MEND program helps overweight and obese children lose weight. They also show that child weight management programs have a positive effect on a child's health and so could help to address the rising obesity problem in children."

The epidemic increase in Western countries in childhood obesity in the

past decades makes the need for effective treatment more and more urgent (1). In the United States the rise in [childhood obesity](#) is markedly higher (2) than in European countries. [Childhood obesity](#) is associated with increased risk of a number of serious medical conditions (3,4) and may track into adulthood as long-term follow-up studies indicate (5). Higher childhood BMI is associated with increased risk of coronary heart disease in adulthood (6), so early prevention and treatment in childhood is therefore crucial.

A January 2010 article published in *Pediatrics*, the official journal of the American Society of Pediatrics, confirmed the importance of programs such as MEND. In this article, The US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), an independent panel of experts in primary care and prevention that systematically reviews the evidence of effectiveness and develops recommendations for clinical preventive services, recommends that clinicians screen children aged 6 years and older for obesity and offer them or refer them to comprehensive, intensive behavioral interventions to promote improvement in weight status.

More information:

- www.nature.com/oby/journal/v18/n1s/abs/oby2009433a.html
- www.mendcentral.org

Provided by MEND Foundation

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