

Family-focused program shows benefit in treating excess weight in children

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Weight Watchers has helped millions of American adults successfully lose weight and now results from a pilot, family-focused Weight Watchers approach designed to support parents shows potential for success in reducing excess weight in children, according to a study presented at the Experimental Biology Annual Meeting, Anaheim, Calif., April 27, 2010.

The pilot program had parents with at least one overweight or obese child attend one-hour sessions led by a Weight Watchers coach who had received specialized training for eight to 10 weeks. A structured diet (e.g. counting and tracking POINTS values) was not included. Rather, the sessions emphasized proven strategies and techniques that create weight-friendly habits for the entire family. At its core were Five Simple Rules:

- Focus on wholesome, nutritious foods;
- Include treats in moderation;
- Keep non-homework screen time to less than two hours per day;
- Be active an hour or more a day; and,
- Apply the rules to everyone in the home.

Families of more than 100 overweight or [obese children](#) (ages seven to 12) participated in the pilot program, that included in-home measurements at baseline, after completion of the weekly sessions, and quarterly for the next year. One year following the completion of the sessions, 67 percent of the children had improved their weight status. In fact, the trend for the children showed continual and progressive improvement in weight status at each checkpoint following the completion of the sessions. This finding suggests a potential for sustained and enhanced benefits from the unique program designed to educate and empower parents.

According to [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), an estimated 17 percent of children and adolescents are obese and at increased risk for serious [health conditions](#). But researchers have struggled to find programs that demonstrate long-term benefits when it comes to child health and weight management.

"Stemming the increase in [childhood obesity](#) is essential, and research suggests involving the entire family is key to success," noted registered dietitian Karen Miller-Kovach, study co-author and chief scientific officer for Weight Watchers International. "Helping families adopt healthful habits not only helps children maintain their weight now, but helps teach kids skills and habits that can last a lifetime."

Role Modeling for Child Health

Previous research suggests that parents' own eating and exercise habits have a strong influence on their children's weight-related choices. The Weight Watchers Family pilot program was developed to help parents understand and implement healthy weight habits into their homes. Building on the group support approach at the heart of the Weight Watchers model, the pilot provided opportunities for concerned parents to connect with other committed parents and determine the behavioral

and lifestyle changes that were best for their families.

"This research adds to the evidence that children really do follow in their parents' footsteps," said Miller-Kovach. "Our Weight Watchers approach to inspire healthful habits for adults doesn't stop there - there's huge potential to translate these benefits to the entire family."

More information: Rost SL, Miller-Kovach K, Angelopoulos T, Rippe JM. Family-focused program shows benefit in treating excess weight in children. FASEB Journal. 2010; 24:322.7.

Provided by Weight Watchers International

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