

Parents Can Help Overweight Kids With Body Image

April 20 2010, by Susan Kreimer

When parents maintain a healthy body image and weight-control strategies, overweight adolescent children tend to follow their example, a new study reveals.

“There was a pretty strong association between parent body satisfaction and [adolescent](#) body satisfaction,” said Taya Cromley, Ph.D., who led the study at University of California, San Diego. “Messages from parents about weight and [body image](#) can be communicated directly or indirectly. It’s important to consider what the message is that’s being communicated.”

The study, which appears online of the [Journal of Adolescent Health](#), analyzed self-completed surveys from 103 overweight adolescents, primarily females ages 12 to 20, and their parents -- mostly mothers -- all in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. The study defined “overweight” as a body-mass index above the 85th percentile in comparison with peers of the same age and sex.

Psychosocial components - parents’ depression, self-esteem, body satisfaction and emphasis on thinness - also influenced adolescents. Another variable that factored into the equation was family dynamics - how well everyone got along and adapted to change.

In the study, unhealthy weight-control behaviors consisted of fasting, skipping meals, vomiting and taking laxatives, diuretics or diet pills. Meanwhile, healthy weight-control behaviors included decreasing

calories, increasing exercise, eating more fruits and vegetables and avoiding food high in fat.

The authors concluded that the social-emotional climate at home matters.

“Attachment or bonding in the family was shown to decrease children’s episodes of overeating,” said Brenda Lohman, Ph.D., an associate professor of human development and family studies at Iowa State University in Ames, who did not take part in this study. “Indeed, my own work shows that [family](#) and household stress has been linked to increased levels of childhood and adolescent obesity as well.”

More information: Cromley TR, et al. Parent and family associations with weight-related behaviors and cognitions among overweight adolescents. *J Adolesc Health* online, 2010.

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