

The biggest winners: Summer campers

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A residential summer weight-loss camp markedly improved obese children's health, a study in the April edition of *Pediatrics* reports. A Saint Louis University physician found the camp improved children's weight, body mass index (BMI), physical fitness and blood pressure.

"Weight loss is like beating addiction, you have to redirect the [social environment](#) to be successful," said Nadim Kanafani, M.D., corresponding author and assistant professor of pediatrics at Saint Louis University School of Medicine. "When a child can interact with others struggling with the same problem it helps sustain their weight-loss effort, and they are more likely to improve both physically and psychologically."

According to Kanafani, obese children struggle with their body's awkwardness in running, jumping and playing, which causes them to withdraw from these physical activities and make unhealthy lifestyle choices. This can be reversed when obese children are placed together to focus on losing weight and improving [physical fitness](#).

Kanafani tracked obese 10- to 18-year old adolescents who attended a weight-loss camp. They participated in physical activities and group educational sessions covering nutrition, physical fitness and self-esteem. During their stay, the kids ate three balanced meals and two snacks per day prepared under the supervision of a registered dietician.

The results showed an average weight loss of more than eight pounds and average reduction in BMI score of three points. Additionally,

participants' blood pressure dropped significantly and fitness levels, as measured by a one-mile run, improved markedly.

The weight-loss camp in the study, Camp Jump Start, used a number of proven techniques to achieve modification of [dietary habits](#), increase physical activity and provide social support for participants. These methods resulted in [health benefits](#) as well as significant increases in self-esteem. Camp founder Jean Huelsing, who is a nurse, is the lead author on the paper.

"When kids support one another good things happen," said Kanafani. "These peer-supported groups spark positive changes in motivation, eating behavior and body image."

Kanafani hopes to expand his study to follow the obese children in the future to see if they sustain the gains made during summer camp.

Provided by Saint Louis University

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