

A healthy beginning can prevent overweight and obesity

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Regular 'tummy time' helps strengthen infants' neck and back muscles, and could help prevent overweight and obesity.

Early and regular home visits to first-time mothers that encourage breastfeeding and 'tummy time' during their child's first year of life improve the likelihood of their children growing up being a healthy weight, according to research published in Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine.

As part of the Healthy Beginnings Trial, 667 first-time [mothers](#) were visited by an early childhood health nurse at the antenatal period and then when the child is one, three, five, nine and 12 months.

As part of the visits the nurses supported the mothers to continue

breastfeeding and encouraged regular 'tummy time', where infants lie on their stomachs, which helps to strengthen infants' neck and back muscle motor movement. These are crucial for more complicated movements such as sitting, rolling over and crawling.

The researchers from the University of Sydney and the Sydney and South Western Sydney Local Health Districts undertook the Healthy Beginnings Trial in 2007 to gather evidence of the effectiveness of early interventions on early-life risk factors for obesity in children.

Dr Li Ming Wen, lead researcher from the University of Sydney and South Western Sydney Local Health Districts said that risk factors for overweight and obesity can be modified if addressed early.

"This is a very important finding considering 21 percent of boys and 18 percent of girls in Australia aged two to three years are overweight or obese.

"It looks as though if we intervene early we can actually make a difference in the long-term," Dr Wen said.

Professor Louise Baur from the University of Sydney said that this is the first randomised controlled trial to test the effectiveness of an early childhood obesity intervention in the first two years of life.

"These finding are clinically very important. The intervention group (at 12 months) breastfed for an average of 17 weeks compared to the control group that breastfed for 13 weeks.

"The mothers in the intervention group also gave their children solids much later," she said.

Professor Chris Rissel also from the University of Sydney said that

mothers that received the [home visits](#) also increased the daily practice of tummy time from 76 percent to 83 percent and started tummy time with their infants much earlier.

"We are very optimistic that the results at two years will show a positive effect on weight," he said.

The children in the Healthy Beginnings Trial will be followed up until the age of five.

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