

# Parent-training intervention curbs pediatric obesity rates, study shows

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A UCLA study has found that a new parent-training program is effective in reducing the risk of low-income, preschool-age Latino children being overweight.

Researchers found that after one year, there was a 9 percent reduction in overweight and obese [children](#) in the parent-training [intervention group](#), while a control group that did not receive the parent training had a 16 percent increase in overweight and [obese children](#).

"This is the first pilot [intervention study](#) that reversed the weight gain seen in preschool Latino children living in low-income families," said lead author Dr. Wendy Slusser, an associate professor of pediatrics and public health at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA and the UCLA School of Public Health and director of the Fit for Healthy Weight program at Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA. "The intervention was unique because it blended nutrition, [physical activity](#) and parenting topics that were delivered in a participatory manner and where mothers learned from each other and practiced the skills at home."

The findings are reported in the February issue of the journal *Childhood Obesity*, a special issue celebrating the second anniversary of first lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move initiative and highlighting original research focused on advancements in [childhood obesity](#).

Overweight and [obesity rates](#) among preschoolers aged 2 to 5 are high, with disparities evident among racial and ethnic groups: 28 percent of

Mexican American preschoolers are obese or overweight, as are 26 percent of African Americans and 17 percent of Caucasians. Preventing obesity in Latino children can have major [public health](#) benefits, given that Latinos are among the groups with the highest risk of developing obesity and its associated conditions, such as diabetes and hypertension.

The randomized, controlled study evaluated the culturally sensitive parent-training intervention, which consisted of one-and-a-half-hour classes once a week for seven weeks, along with two booster sessions, given one month apart. The control group was wait-listed and given a standard informational nutritional pamphlet. The [control group](#) was offered the parent-training classes after the one-year follow-up.

The study addressed the risks and causes of obesity in low-income Latino children and included participants from the Venice Family Clinic's Simms/Mann Health and Wellness Center and community sites including Los Angeles Unified School District preschools, the Santa Monica Headstart program, the Mar Vista Family Center and the Children's Bureau.

The evaluation assessed the effectiveness of the seven-week intervention, contrasting children receiving parent training with wait-listed subjects. The study evaluated changes in body-mass index (BMI) percentiles over time for the two conditions in a longitudinal design.

The authors concluded that the combination of parent training and nutrition education administered to low-income mothers of preschool-age Latino children can reverse the anticipated curve of increased BMI scores for at least one year after the start of treatment.

In addition, the researchers found:

- Interventions that combine high-priority issues such as parenting with the promotion of nutrition and physical activity are promising in promoting health and wellness among low-income families.
- Parenting interventions are in high demand among service providers in communities serving preschool families.
- Interventions for parents of young children should take place in the communities they live in and/or gather in on a regular basis.

"This study suggests that parents are in the ideal position to influence the long-term dietary and physical activity of their children," said study co-author Fred Frankel, a professor of psychiatry and biobehavioral sciences at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. "By coupling the topics of nutrition and physical activity along with building parenting skills, mothers can be equipped with the skills and knowledge to reverse the obesity trend."

The next stage of research will involve studying the pilot intervention program in a larger population and with populations that have different demographics.

Provided by University of California - Los Angeles

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