

Parents important in steering kids away from sedentary activities

April 30 2012, By Milly Dawson, Contributing Writer

Parents can have a significant impact in steering young children away from too much time spent in sedentary pursuits. This new study, in the *American Journal of Health Promotion*, found this effect in Hispanic families, whose children are more likely to be sedentary than non-Hispanic white children and who are also especially vulnerable to becoming overweight or obese.

“We found that family support is very important for reducing [children’s](#) sedentary behaviors,” said author Zhen Cong, Ph.D., an assistant professor of human development and family studies at Texas Tech University. The sedentary behaviors were mainly TV-watching, computer use and video-game playing, referred to as “screen time”.

The researchers followed 418 parent-child pairings for two years. The [parents](#) and children, who were from 5 to 9 years old, participated in a program called Transformacion Para Salud (Change for Health), which involved nutrition education, encouragement of exercise and family participation.

Parents were surveyed to determine how much support they provided for active living in their children. Kids with stronger parental support had lower levels of sedentary behaviors.

The research team observed significant gender differences. Girls started out with less sedentary behaviors (as measured by screen time), Cong noted, yet boys were more likely to reduce their sedentary behaviors in

response to their parents' encouragement and support.

“Our findings suggest that it is important to test comprehensive, multidimensional, and culturally sensitive interventions suited to the developmental stages of childhood,” said Cong. “The bottom line is that it is important to involve families in intervention programs to effectively reduce children’s sedentary behaviors.”

Lloyd N. Werk, M.D., MPH, chief of the general pediatrics division at Nemours Children’s Hospital said, “Sedentary behaviors, such as extended screen time, are significant risk factors for childhood obesity. This study highlights the impact we can have on engaging the whole family to support children in becoming more active and less sedentary.”

The study’s authors found that gains in promoting healthier lifestyle choices faded after several months. Because of this, both Werk and the authors concluded that work remains to identify ways to secure and build on parental support for active living.

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

Citation: Parents important in steering kids away from sedentary activities (2012, April 30) retrieved 3 May 2024 from

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