

# Obesity a concern? Don't use sweets to reward children's behaviour, reduce screen time

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Cutting screen time and not rewarding children's good behaviour with sweets are among the steps parents could take to reduce overweight and obesity in children before they start school, according to research by the University of Sydney.

The study, led by Dr Louise Hardy, from the School of Public Health and published in the journal *Preventive Medicine* also showed many parents do not realise their children have a weight problem.

As reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* the study of more than 1200 children aged up to five found:

- "home environment is the most important factor contributing to children's weight gain;
- almost a third of [overweight children](#) had a television in their bedrooms and nearly half ate dinner in front of the TV more than three times a week;
- more than 60 percent of both healthy and overweight children were rewarded for good behaviour with sweets, while more than one-fifth of overweight and [obese children](#) did not eat breakfast;
- 70 percent of parents of overweight [kindergarten children](#) thought their child was the 'right weight' and 30 percent of the parents of obese children thought their child was the right

weight;

- overweight boys were more likely to eat dinner in front of the television and watch too much of it, while [overweight girls](#) were more likely to have a television in their bedrooms and be rewarded with sweets."

The researchers concluded that the foundation for many lifestyle behaviours is already established by the time children enter school.

Social marketing strategies that communicate to parents the benefits of changing routines in the home, such as eating breakfast and limiting the use of screens, have the potential to help children start school in optimum health, the researchers said.

**More information:** [www.sciencedirect.com/science/ ...  
ii/S0091743512004562](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/...ii/S0091743512004562)

Provided by University of Sydney

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