

New study highlights how child care providers can be part of the solution for childhood obesity

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The National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys revealed that over 21% of children 2 to 5 years old were considered overweight or obese. Child care settings can serve as a platform to teach children about nutrition in our fight against childhood obesity, as nearly 50% of children in the United States under age 5 are enrolled in child care. In a new study released in the November/December 2012 issue of the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, training child care providers about their role in children's healthful eating is an essential component of child care-based obesity prevention initiatives.

This study from Washington State University called the ENHANCE project, looked at 72 child care providers from 45 child care settings before and after a three-hour wellness retreat, and focused on feeding relationships, [child nutrition](#) education, and [family communication](#). This forum provided tools and skills for providers to succeed in incorporating [obesity prevention](#) and healthful eating promotion within their child care setting. Based on observations and a survey before and one year after the wellness retreat, researchers found child care providers' beliefs related to children's healthful eating and feeding affected classroom practices. For example, if a child care provider felt confident in their ability to provide [nutrition information](#), then they increased their nutrition education efforts and communicated more frequently with families about healthful eating and child feeding.

Jane D. Lanigan, PhD, the lead investigator from Washington State University, says, "Teachers did feel empowered to shape children's food preferences and employed a variety of evidence-based practices during feeding. However, they felt uncertain about managing children's intake or addressing child weight issues with parents. The current study suggests that the child care feeding environment can be improved by helping providers understand the [negative consequences](#) associated with feeding practices such as pressuring a child to eat, restricting highly palatable food, and using rewards to encourage children to eat healthful food or increase consumption."

So why is this important for childcare? Dr. Lanigan says, "The potential for early learning professionals to contribute to the childhood obesity solution has yet to be fully realized. The ENHANCE project sought to position obesity prevention within the early learning philosophy of promoting the development of the 'whole child' and help child care providers connect child care feeding practices to children's development of lasting beliefs about healthful eating."

"Incorporating child feeding training into state child care licensure, national certification, or as a requirement for participation in the Child & Adult Care Food Program are potential mechanisms for improving the child care feeding environment and addressing the [childhood obesity](#) epidemic."

More information: "The Relationship between Practices and Child Care Providers' Beliefs Related to Child Feeding and Obesity Prevention," by Jane D. Lanigan, PhD, appears in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, Volume 44, Issue 6 (November/December 2012)

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