

Is guided self-help effective in treating childhood obesity?

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It is known that family-based treatment that combines nutrition and exercise education, along with behavior modification, is a good approach to help children lose weight. But clinic-based weight-control programs for childhood obesity are not accessible to many families, due to issues such as cost or time commitment.

Initial studies at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine indicate that a self-help treatment program for [overweight children](#) and their parents, guided by clinical experts, may be an effective solution. The study, led by Kerri Boutelle, PhD, associate professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at UC San Diego School of Medicine – the first to demonstrate the effectiveness of such a program – will be published in the journal *Pediatrics* on April 1.

Boutelle and colleagues enrolled 50 overweight or [obese children](#) between the ages of 8 and 12 and their family members in a low-intensity, 5-month long treatment for [childhood obesity](#), measuring the effects on a child's weight (measured as [body mass index](#) or BMI) immediately post-treatment and six months later. The researchers also evaluated whether the intervention promoted improvements in eating behavior and physical activity among children and parents. The results of the guided, self-help intervention program showed a significant decrease in [BMI](#) immediately after completing the 5-month treatment, losses that were maintained six months later.

According to the UCSD researchers, such a program may be an

improvement over current methods, especially because the program is designed to fit a busy family's schedule.

"The guided self-help treatment includes offering structure along with a self-help program to help families stick to the program," said Boutelle.

"Parents and their [children](#) are given a manual, and each week they read a chapter and try to apply the skills at home. Every other week they come in to our clinic at UC San Diego School of Medicine for 20 minutes and discuss how things were going with an interventionist. This is very different than traditional weight control programs where parents and kids come in every week for an hour-and-a-half-long group-based program."

"Importantly, the initial results of this study showed that that a self-help program, guided by professionals, may be as effective in helping kids to lose weight as a traditional, clinic-based weight loss program," Boutelle concluded.

Provided by University of California - San Diego

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