

# Conversations with teens about weight linked with increased risk of unhealthy eating behaviors

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Conversations between parents and adolescents that focus on weight and size are associated with an increased risk for unhealthy adolescent weight-control behaviors, according to a study published Online First by *JAMA Pediatrics*.

The study by University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, researchers also found that overweight or obese adolescents whose mothers engaged in conversations that were focused only on healthful eating behaviors were less likely to [diet](#) and use unhealthy weight-[control behaviors](#) (UWCBs).

"Because adolescence is a time when more youths engage in disordered eating behaviors, it is important for parents to understand what types of conversations may be helpful or harmful in regard to disordered eating behaviors and how to have these conversations with their adolescents," Jerica M. Berge, Ph.D., M.P.H., L.M.F.T., of the University of Minnesota Medical School, and colleagues write in the study background.

The study used data from two linked population-based studies and included surveys completed by adolescents and parents. The study's final sample consisted of 2,348 adolescents (average age, 14.4 years) and 3,528 parents.

Among overweight adolescents whose mothers engaged in healthful

eating conversations compared with those whose mothers did not engage in healthful eating conversations, there was a significantly lower prevalence of dieting (40.1 percent vs. 53.4 percent, respectively) and UWCBs (40.6 percent vs. 53.2 percent, respectively), according to the study results.

The results also indicate that weight conversations from one parent or from both parents were associated with a significantly higher prevalence of dieting relative to parents who engaged in only healthful eating conversations (35.2 percent and 37.1 percent vs. 21.2 percent, respectively). The study also found that adolescents whose fathers engaged in weight conversations were significantly more likely to engage in dieting and UWCBs than [adolescents](#) whose fathers did not.

"Finally, for [parents](#) who may wonder whether talking with their adolescent child about eating habits and weight is useful or detrimental, results from this study indicate that they may want to focus on discussing and promoting healthful eating behaviors rather than discussing weight and size, regardless of whether their child is nonoverweight or overweight," the authors conclude.

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