

Study suggests focus on lifestyle changes—not weight loss—is key to kids' health

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A UCLA School of Nursing study has found that both healthy-weight and obese children who participated in an intensive lifestyle modification program significantly improved their metabolic and cardiovascular health despite little weight loss.

"These findings suggest that short-term [lifestyle modifications](#) through changing diet and exercise can have an immediate impact on improving risk factors such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes," said Christian Roberts, an associate research professor at the UCLA School of Nursing and the study's lead author. "This work underscores the need to focus on changing lifestyle as opposed to focusing on body weight and weight loss."

This study is believed to be the first to compare the effects of changing diet and exercise in both normal-weight and obese children. The article is published online in the *American Journal of Physiology*.

Both groups of children participated in a two-week, residential lifestyle program consisting of daily exercise and a high-fiber, low-fat, plant-based diet. Contrary to conventional wisdom that the change would only impact the obese children, both groups of children improved cardiovascular and metabolic disease risk factors similarly as a result of the intervention.

In the United States, 34 percent of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 19 are overweight or obese. Unhealthy lifestyle factors that begin in childhood, such as [physical inactivity](#), lack of exercise training, and diets that are high in refined carbohydrates and fat, contribute to both the development of obesity and other chronic diseases, but it is unclear whether obesity itself or the associated [lifestyle factors](#) are underlying causes of cardiovascular and metabolic dysfunction and the related development of chronic disease.

"Even if individuals are at normal weight, they may have metabolic abnormalities and this study demonstrates that health status can be significantly improved by changing [lifestyle habits](#)," Roberts said.

Study co-authors from UCLA were Ali Izadpanah, Siddhartha Angadi and R. James Barnard.

The next step for the researchers will be to perform a randomized control trial investigating the effects of lifestyle intervention in normal-weight and obese adults.

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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