

# Colombian preschoolers learn heart-healthy lessons with Sesame Street

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Credit: Sesame Workshop

When *Sesame Street* characters talk about healthy eating and exercise, your preschoolers may listen.

In a late-breaking clinical trial presented at the American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions 2013, preschoolers in Bogotá, Colombia participating in a structured curriculum that used Sesame Street's Healthy Habits for Life materials improved their knowledge, attitudes and habits related to a heart-healthy lifestyle. Also, the

percentage of children at a healthy weight improved by 13 percent.

In 2006, Valentin Fuster, M.D., Ph.D., the study's principal investigator and Director of Mount Sinai Heart at The Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, partnered with Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit educational organization behind *Sesame Street*, to develop this campaign to promote [cardiovascular health](#) education in the developing countries. Colombia was selected as the pilot.

"Cardiovascular health promotion should be started as early as possible and be integrated into all aspects of a child's life, including family and school," said Jaime Cespedes, M.D., co-author of the Promotion of Cardiovascular Health in Preschool Children study and director of the Pediatric Hospital at the Cardioinfantil Foundation Institute of Cardiology in Bogotá.

In a five-month school based intervention, *Sesame Street* characters introduced heart-healthy ideas and actions to three- to five-year-olds and their parents in 14 preschools in underprivileged neighborhoods in Bogotá. Topics included:

- Loving and caring for your body;
- Eating a variety of foods, with a rainbow of colorful fruits and vegetables as "everyday foods" and other foods (such as cookies) as "sometime" foods;
- Physical activity as a way to feel great and play with your friends, with opportunities for exercise in many settings.

Three years after the intervention, researchers retested 598 children and 475 parents:

- Compared to their scores prior to the program, the children's knowledge improved 15 percent, attitudes 51 percent, and heart-

healthy habits 27 percent.

- The percentage of children at a [healthy weight](#) rose from 62 percent to 75 percent.
- Parents' increased knowledge and attitudes about heart-healthy behavior was smaller, but significant.

"As a result of our successful pilot intervention in Colombia, the program has also been implemented in Spain, where we have expanded our reach to 20,000 more children," Fuster said. "Additional countries are now joining in the implementation of this vital childhood intervention allowing for increased education about the benefits of a heart-healthy lifestyle to better protect our world's tiniest hearts."

In addition, Colombia researchers are developing an intervention targeted at [children](#) in rural preschools and another aimed at those in the elementary grades.

Provided by American Heart Association

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