

# Support from grandparents linked with lower levels of obesity in children

July 27 2015

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A new pilot study from Karolinska Institutet and the University of Oxford has shown how important the support from grandparents could be in protecting against child obesity.

According to the study, published in *Pediatric Obesity*, [emotional support](#) from [grandparents](#) may have a preventative effect against [child obesity](#), even with the presence of other risk factors.

Previous studies have shown that the parents' socioeconomic status affects the risk of children developing obesity. Researchers from Karolinska Institutet in Sweden and the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Oxford looked at the effect of other factors relating to a child's family background. The study involved 39 preschool-aged children from Stockholm County in Sweden who had received treatment for obesity. Both parents of the children answered detailed questionnaires about their education, income, occupation and home environment, including the kinds of support they received and whether they received much from their own parents, i.e. the children's grandparents. The questions aimed to establish the extent to which grandparents contributed daily support, e.g. help with washing and cleaning, financial support and emotional support.

The researchers found that when the parents received emotional support from their own parents, it had a protective effect against obesity in their children. Previous studies suggest that the parents' income can be linked to the BMI, Body Mass Index, of their children. However, this research shows that in cases where the children's parents had a low income if they received a high level of emotional support from the grandparents, there was a lower degree of obesity than in families of similar income but low levels of emotional support.

'Our study shows that emotional support from grandparents may have a preventive effect against child obesity, which is a serious disease. These findings could, for instance, be incorporated into the planning of public health programmes that are aimed at reducing obesity in children. Greater social support for families with small [children](#) could help alleviate stress in parents, who will thereby be in a better position to make better food choices,' said Paulina Nowicka, Associate Professor at the Department of Clinical Science, Intervention and Technology at Karolinska Institutet.

Professor Stanley Ulijaszek, from Oxford University's Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, said: 'Less stressed [parents](#) who are receiving support from their families are likely to make better food choices at family meal times and be more attentive in their parenting. More research is needed, however, to establish the significance of social relationships on eating patterns. This study was limited both in its sample size and in recruiting families from an obesity clinic rather than the general population.'

**More information:** "Low grandparental social support combined with low parental socioeconomic status is closely associated with obesity in preschool-aged children: a pilot study." *Pediatric Obesity*.  
doi: 10.1111/ijpo.12049

Provided by Oxford University

Citation: Support from grandparents linked with lower levels of obesity in children (2015, July 27) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-07-grandparents-linked-obesity-children.html>

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