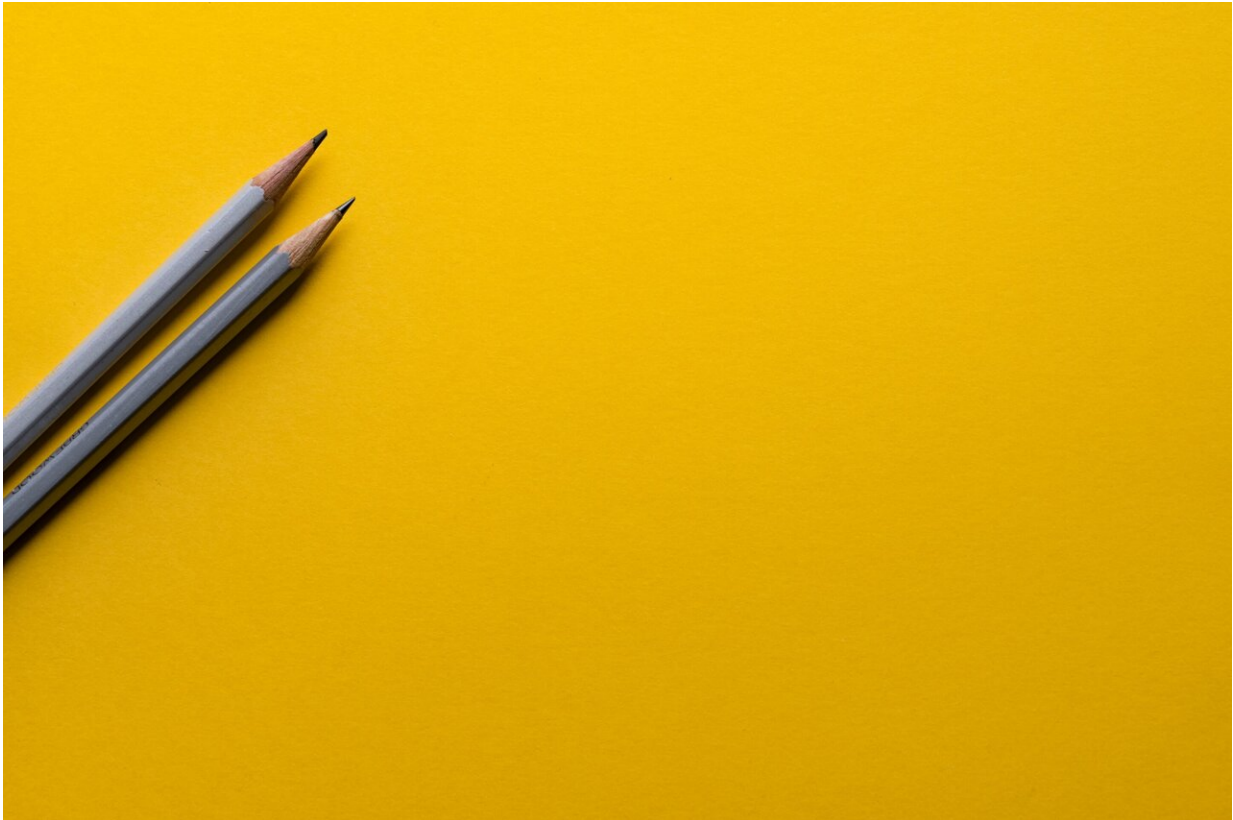


# Child care's role in fight against obesity

October 9 2015, by Daniel P. Jones And Beth Krane

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Policy changes are needed to address childhood obesity in child care settings and help child care providers to reinforce healthy eating and physical activity, according to new research from the University of Connecticut.

In six studies published today in a special section of the journal *Childhood Obesity*, titled "Wellness Promotion in Child Care: Evidence to Action," the UConn researchers offer a variety of recommendations to improve [child care](#) policies and practices in order to curb childhood obesity.

Because many [young children](#) spend more time in child-care settings than any other place except home, child care is an important opportunity to influence young children's diets and physical activity.

"The findings from these studies inform how out-of-home child care providers can work together with families to reinforce healthy eating and physical activity," says Marlene Schwartz, a professor of human development and family studies who is an author on two of the studies and director of the UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity.

Five of the six studies identified areas for improvement, and barriers to making progress on healthy diets and adequate physical activity levels in child-care settings. According to the findings of the new research, the following types of support are needed to help child-care providers improve diets and increase physical activity among young children:

- Parent outreach, staff training, funding, space and equipment for physical activity, modifying cultural norms about child feeding and physical activity that are not consistent with a healthy lifestyle, and
- Assistance with strategies to decrease levels of saturated fat and sodium in meals served in childcare settings, and increase levels of whole grains in the meals served.

Two of the studies examined strategies to improve dietary intake, identifying promising approaches to:

- Increase child preferences for healthy foods, and
- Improve the healthfulness of meals in child-care centers.

One of the studies reported findings about a promising new tool to determine what preschoolers actually consume, identify those at risk of poor nutrition, and better inform child-care interventions to promote healthy eating habits.

"Collectively, the articles encourage policymakers to see [early care and education] as a critical partner in the fight against childhood obesity, and represent the current challenges and opportunities to promote nutritious eating and physical activity in young children," says Myra Jones-Taylor, commissioner of the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, who contributed an editorial to the journal issue in which the studies are published. "Through smart policy and education of children, providers, families, and policy makers, we can not only address childhood obesity, but help set the stage for healthier adults later on in life."

Kim Gans, a professor of human development and family studies and a co-author on one of the studies, says the articles highlight the importance of considering the unique needs of different child-care settings, such as family child-care homes, Spanish-speaking providers, and rural providers, when crafting policies and translating them into practice.

Gans has an active National Heart Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) grant to help home-based child-care providers in Rhode Island improve the nutrition and physical activity environments of their homes.

"While improved policies are needed to facilitate [childhood obesity](#) prevention in child-care settings, there are many different types of child-care settings and one size does not fit all," she says.

**More information:** Schwartz Marlene B. et al. "Comparing Current

Practice to Recommendations for the Child and Adult Care Food Program." *Childhood Obesity*. October 2015, 11(5): 491-498. [DOI: 10.1089/chi.2015.0041](https://doi.org/10.1089/chi.2015.0041)

Provided by University of Connecticut

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