

# A younger sibling may be good for your child's health

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Credit: Robert Kraft/public domain

Becoming a big brother or big sister before first grade may lower a child's risk of becoming obese, a new study led by the University of Michigan suggests.

The birth of a sibling, especially when the child was between about 2 and

4 years old, was associated with a healthier body mass index (BMI) by first grade, according to the research. Children the same age who didn't have a sibling were nearly three times more likely to be obese by first grade.

The findings, which included 697 children across the U.S., appear in the April 2016 issue of *Pediatrics*.

"Research suggests that having [younger siblings](#) - compared with having older or no siblings - is associated with a lower risk of being overweight. However, we have very little information about how the birth of a sibling may shape [obesity risk](#) during childhood," says senior author Julie Lumeng, M.D., a developmental and behavioral pediatrician at U-M's C.S. Mott Children's Hospital.

"This study is believed to be the first to track subsequent increases in BMI after a child becomes a [big brother](#) or sister."

One possible explanation, the authors speculate, could be that parents may change the way they feed their child once a new sibling is born. With children developing long-lasting eating habits at around three years old, changing dietary habits may have a significant impact.

Authors also note that children may engage in more 'active play' or less sedentary time in front of screens once a younger sibling is born, contributing to healthier BMIs.

"We need to further study how having a sibling may impact even subtle changes such as mealtime behaviors and physical activity," says Lumeng, who is also with U-M's School of Public Health and Center for Human Growth and Development.

"Childhood obesity rates continue to be a great cause of concern. If the

birth of a sibling changes behaviors within a family in ways that protect against obesity, these may be patterns other families can try to create in their own homes. Better understanding the potential connection between a [sibling](#) and weight may help health providers and families create new strategies for helping [children](#) grow up healthy."

**More information:** "Effect of Sibling Birth on BMI Trajectory in the First 6 Years of Life," *Pediatrics*, April, 2016. [DOI: 10.1542/peds.2015-2456](#)

Provided by University of Michigan Health System

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