

Television viewing a predictor of weight change in children over time

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Credit: Petr Kratochvil/public domain

Researchers at the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University observed little effect of health behaviors, including eating habits, television viewing, and physical activity, on change in weight among

children.

Conducted by Solveig Cunningham, PhD and Sandra Jackson, researchers in the Hubert Department of Global Health at Rollins School of Public Health, the team analyzed data from the Kindergarten Cohort of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of US children to assess the effects of behavioral factors such as [eating habits](#), (fruits, vegetables, fast foods, and beverages), sedentary habits ([television viewing](#)) and physical activities on weight gain over time. After assessing Body Mass Index (BMI) scores from kindergarten throughout childhood, the study results indicated that BMI was highly stable over time between Kindergarten and 8th grade. However, of the behaviors assessed, the team determined that television viewing habits were the primary predictor of weight gain over time.

"We found that [health behaviors](#) that are central to recommendations for preventing and reversing childhood obesity - television viewing, [physical activity](#), and dietary intake – for the most part did not affect children's changes in weight; instead, children's weight status was highly stable over time," explains Cunningham. The more striking finding was the effect of weight on behaviors. When children became heavier, they started to watch more television and be less active, indicating that overweight in children may negatively affect their behavior.

Given the stability of children's weight status in elementary and middle school, researchers recommend that future interventions target efforts for younger children under the age of five.

Complete findings are available in *Preventive Medicine*.

Provided by Emory University

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