

A home-based weight management program benefits both children and parents

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Obese children are four times more likely to become obese adults making childhood obesity a significant health threat. A new study in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* found the Developing

Relationships that Include Values of Eating and Exercise (DRIVE) curriculum mitigated weight gain in at-risk children as well as prompting their parents to lose weight.

"Parents typically are the most important and influential people in a child's environment," said authors Keely Hawkins, Ph.D., and Corby K. Martin, Ph.D., Pennington Biomedical Research Center, Louisiana State University System, Baton Rouge, LA, USA. "Adding this [weight](#) management strategy to existing state and federal home visitation programs could help address the current [childhood obesity](#) crisis."

Sixteen families participated in the study and were recruited from the community based on the child's obesity risk. Children 2-6 years of age with a body mass index greater than the 75th percentile enrolled. Families were randomly assigned to receive [health information](#) only or the DRIVE intervention.

The DRIVE curriculum was provided during 15 in-person sessions in the family's home. Sessions were 30 minutes long, during which parents and [children](#) practiced healthy daily routines including establishing regular snack and mealtimes, reducing screen time, and encouraging physically active play. Each session focused on a single health topic such as portion size, food preparation, how to discuss weight and growth concerns with the pediatrician, and effective parenting strategies. The group that did not receive in-home visits was mailed information on nutrition, [physical activity](#), and parent-child interaction at the beginning of the study.

Children in the DRIVE intervention maintained their body weight with a modest reduction in body mass index over the 19 weeks of the study, while the children who received health education significantly increased their body weight and body mass index. Additionally, parents who participated in the DRIVE sessions also decreased their body weight.

The study also reported that all 16 families completed the program. This level of participation is much higher than programs delivered through clinics or community programs, which can see as many as 75 percent of attendees leave the classes. There are many federal and state services already being provided through home-based visitation programs and this curriculum could be a valuable addition to those efforts.

Dr. Hawkins and Dr. Martin shared, "Our results showed that at the half-way point of the study, children were becoming healthier. Changes in the health of the parents, though, did not happen until the end of the study. This points to the need for long-term, family-based programs to support behavior change."

More information: "Efficacy of a Home-Based Parent Training-Focused Weight Management Intervention for Preschool Children: The DRIVE Randomized Controlled Pilot Trial," *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jneb.2019.04.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2019.04.002)

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