

Do weight loss interventions for children work?

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First came Kurbo, a new app launched by Weight Watchers (WW) on Aug 13 to help children ages 8 to 17 make healthier food choices and lose weight.

Then came the pushback from critics, including an [online petition](#) signed by more than 87,000 people stating that the app is "irresponsible" because it could lead [children](#) to develop eating disorders.

Within days, an op-ed appeared in the *New York Times*. Christy Harrison, a registered dietitian, wrote in her article, "[I Help People Recover from Disordered Eating. Don't Give Your Child This App](#)," that "attempts to shrink a child's body are likely to be both ineffective and harmful to physical and [mental health](#)."

Now, obesity specialist and HOBI Assistant Professor Michelle Cardel, Ph.D., R.D. has joined the national discussion. Cardel collaborated with Elsie Taveras, M.D., a pediatrician and professor at Harvard and a member of the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Committee, to write a commentary on the subject, which was published in the journal *Child Obesity* on Aug. 26.

Both Cardel and Taveras were interviewed by *New York Times* columnist Perri Klass, M.D., and quoted in her Aug. 26 column, "[Helping Children Learn to Eat Well](#)."

"We always take the approach of 'first, do no harm,'" Dr. Cardel was quoted as saying in the article. "But we also do need to take into account the [health](#) issues of [obesity](#) ... which affects almost one of every five children from 2 to 19 years old, and one in four children in lower socioeconomic groups. It is linked to cardiometabolic disease and certain types of cancer, and also affects a child's emotional health."

More information: Michelle I. Cardel et al. Let's Not Just Dismiss the Weight Watchers Kurbo App, *Childhood Obesity* (2019). [DOI: 10.1089/chi.2019.29000.car](#)

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