

Study looks at links between cognition, psychopathology, weight in preteens

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Lower cognition and greater psychopathology at baseline are associated with increased weight gain for children entering adolescence, according to a research letter [published](#) June 3 in *JAMA Pediatrics*.

Zhaolong Adrian Li, from the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, and colleagues examined how weight indices for [children](#) aged 9 to 11 years are associated with changes in cognition and psychopathology across the two years thereafter.

The [cohort study](#) included baseline and one- and two-year follow-up Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study data. Weight indices and psychopathology were assessed annually, and cognition was evaluated at baseline and two years. Data were included for 5,269 participants.

The researchers found no association for baseline body mass index (BMI) with longitudinal changes in cognition. Conversely, lower baseline cognition was associated with greater longitudinal BMI gain overall. There was an association for higher baseline BMI with more longitudinal withdrawn or depression symptoms and depression problems.

Compared with those with normal weight, children with overweight or obesity at baseline gained 0.07 and 0.06 more problems annually (172 and 93%, respectively). Conversely, there was a broad association seen for greater baseline psychopathology with greater BMI gain (e.g., each baseline endorsement of externalizing problems corresponded to 0.015 more annual BMI increases; 2.2%).

"These longitudinal findings highlight the importance of cognitive and [mental health](#) to children's healthy weight development and suggest that clinicians should monitor children with overweight or obesity for

increased depression problems," the authors write.

More information: Zhaolong Adrian Li et al, Weight Indices, Cognition, and Mental Health From Childhood to Early Adolescence, *JAMA Pediatrics* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2024.1379](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2024.1379)

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