

Weight-based teasing has long-term impact

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A new study from researchers at the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the University of Connecticut and the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota shows that weight-based teasing in adolescence predicts health consequences in adulthood, including obesity, unhealthy weight-control and eating behaviors, and poor body image.

It is known that weight-based teasing is one of the most common forms of bullying that youth face. It most often comes from peers, but youth can also experience weight-based bullying from [family members](#) at home. These experiences can contribute to emotional and physical health problems for youth. But less is known about the long-term impact of weight-based bullying.

The study, published today in *Preventive Medicine*, involved 1,774 adults in the most recent wave of Project EAT (Eating and Activity in Teens and Young Adults), a longitudinal study of ethnically and socioeconomically diverse adolescent girls and boys who have been followed for 15 years through young adulthood, as they entered their 30s.

The study's key findings showed that women who had been teased about their weight in adolescence had greater odds of:

- Having obesity in adulthood (about twice as high as those not teased);
- Engaging in unhealthy weight control behaviors as adults;
- Eating in response to [emotional distress](#) as adults (about twice as high);
- Being dissatisfied with their [body image](#);
- Dieting in the past year.

The findings showed that men teased about their weight in adolescence had greater odds of:

- Having obesity as adults (about twice as high);
- Eating in response to emotional distress;
- Lower body satisfaction.

Importantly, the study findings also highlighted gender differences related to the source of teasing. For women, being teased about their weight by peers and family members in adolescence predicted health problems in adulthood. But for men, negative health outcomes were linked only to weight-based teasing from peers – not from family members.

"In addition to increasing awareness that weight-based teasing can have negative implications for future [health](#) outcomes, our findings suggest the need for broader anti-bullying initiatives that include both the school and family/home environments as targets for intervention," says the study's lead author Rebecca Puhl, deputy director of the UConn Rudd Center and professor of human development and [family](#) studies at the University of Connecticut.

"Health professionals working with youth and families may have unique opportunities to assess youth for their experiences of weight-based teasing, educate parents about the damaging [health consequences](#) of teasing, and offer families resources to support children and help them cope

with weight-based teasing using healthy, effective strategies," says co-author Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, professor in the University of Minnesota School of Public Health's Division of Epidemiology and Community Health, and Principal Investigator of Project EAT.

More information: Rebecca M. Puhl et al.

Experiences of weight teasing in adolescence and weight-related outcomes in adulthood: A 15-year longitudinal study, *Preventive Medicine* (2017).

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