

A spoonful of parenting support might help the medicine go down

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An "alarming" number of families do not stick to treatment plans for their children's long-term health conditions – and University of Queensland researchers are determined to help turn the trend around.

Associate Professor Alina Morawska from UQ's Parenting and Family

Support Centre said rates of treatment adherence for conditions including asthma and eczema were "stubbornly low" at between 40 and 60 per cent.

"We think parenting interventions could be the key to improving children's health for long-term illnesses," she said.

"Helping families of children with chronic health conditions to follow medical advice and stick with a treatment regime would have an impact on the costs of supplying medical services, such as unplanned hospital admissions, as well as improving the lives of these children and their families."

A three-year study conducted by the group established that a brief version of the Triple P – Positive Parenting Program had the potential to improve parenting skills, which could lead to better child behaviour and health-related outcomes.

Dr Morawska said now the research group wanted to demonstrate that a "light-touch behavioural intervention" for parents could have an impact on children's physical symptoms.

"Parents of children with asthma and eczema are certainly keen to participate in this kind of research, which gives us a sense of how much this type of help is needed," Dr Morawska said.

"These parents are often under a lot of stress, which makes the job of sticking to medication schedules difficult.

"It makes sense that a parenting intervention can help but we need to show actual treatment outcomes before we can make the case for an intervention such as this to be made more widely available."

Electronic monitoring technology attached to children's medication devices, such as asthma inhalers and topical medications, could provide a way for the researchers to objectively monitor treatment adherence.

The researchers also want to monitor improvements in physical symptoms.

Dr Morawska said that when children were unwell, parents could become more permissive and over-protective in their parenting style.

"The key for the parents who took part in our study is when they realised that a parenting style with very few limits or rules to guide children's behaviour, or being too over-protective, actually contributed to ongoing difficulties with their child over the long term."

"We see that lightbulb moment happen often during their Triple P sessions."

Provided by University of Queensland

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