

# Parents should team with kids to encourage exercise

March 5 2014, by Sharyn Alden

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Parents can help motivate kids to be more physically active, but the influence may not result in an improvement in their children's body mass index (BMI), finds a new evidence review in the *American Journal of Health Promotion*.

"It was disappointing to find the overall impact of interventions on [physical activity](#) was so minimal. It was encouraging, though, to find parents' influence matters in this area, even with older children and teens," said the review's lead author Jane Cerruti Dellert, Ph.D., RN, assistant professor and director of the pediatric nurse practitioner program at the Seton Hall University College of Nursing in New Jersey.

Health promotion advocates attempting to reduce obesity in American children need to address the role of parents in their children's health-related behaviors, she added.

Researchers compared the results of 21 weight loss or physical activity studies from peer-reviewed journals, dissertations and theses that tested interventions with children, parents or families. The meta-analysis included sample sizes from 31 to 1495 for a total of 6694 children. The most common duration for the studies was 12 weeks and most involved education about exercise and physical activity training.

Across all studies there was little impact on either increasing children's physical activity or reducing their BMI, but, Dellert said, when they looked at studies that involved parents with their children in the interventions, they found a clear positive effect on children's physical activity.

"I would hope that health professionals providing [primary care services](#) to children would be encouraged to continue or expand efforts to support physical activity as a lifestyle for children of all ages and their parents. And I would really hope, that [health insurance companies](#) would routinely include, even in very basic coverage plans, reimbursement for health services to combat obesity, such as health counseling and education," said Dellert.

Stephen Pont, M.D. MPH, medical director for the Texas Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Childhood Obesity, commented that because many unhealthy influences impact [childhood obesity](#), it is difficult to design studies that address enough factors to demonstrate a statistically significant improvement in childhood obesity. "This meta-analysis included a limited number but a diverse variety. However, I don't think it included a sufficient number of studies to be able to comment on the broad effectiveness of targeting children alone or

children and parents together."

Still, Pont noted that when [children](#) make lifestyle changes along with their family members, the changes are more apt to be long lasting and impactful. Pont added that it is asking a lot, often too much, of a child or a teenager to make healthy changes and choices alone.

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

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