

Reducing Childhood Obesity: Home-Based Behavioral Interventions Needed

Obese preschool age children may require a home-based behavioral intervention to effectively lose weight.

January 18, 2018 – LAUNCH, a behavioral intervention aimed at reducing body mass index in preschool-aged children, is more effective than standard care or motivational interviewing in reducing childhood obesity.

Lori J. Stark, PhD and colleagues published their findings in January 2018 issue of *The Journal of Pediatrics*

Childhood obesity affects 2 million preschool-aged children. These children grow up to experience higher rates of adult obesity, severe obesity, diabetes, and asthma. This study looked at the efficacy of different behavioral interventions to determine which treatments, if any, could decrease body mass index in obese preschoolers, with the goal of preventing significant health issues later in life.

This study examined a new behavioral intervention called LAUNCH, or “learning about activity and understanding nutrition for child health.” Children between the ages of 2 and 5 years with body mass indexes above the 95th percentile were included. The participants were randomized in a 1:1:1 ratio to LAUNCH, motivational interviewing, or standard care for a 6-month period.

LAUNCH consisted of 18 alternating clinic and home-based sessions, lasting 60-90 minutes each. Licensed clinical psychologists worked with parents and children to improve diet, increase exercise, and work on child behavior management. Motivational interviewing also consisted of 18 sessions, but was focused on the parent only. Parents initially met with a pediatrician and later a licensed clinical psychologist to discuss goals for their child’s weight loss. Standard care patients did not receive intervention. Parents were notified of their child’s weight, but no further treatment was given.

The primary outcome measured was body mass index z-score at six months. Body mass index z-score decreased 0.32 for LAUNCH participants, 0.05 for motivational interviewing participants, and 0.13 for those receiving standard care. Results were significant to a p-value <0.001. Looking at the data another way, “children in motivational interviewing and standard care gained almost triple the amount of weight during the 6-month period as children in LAUNCH.” No serious adverse effects occurred during the study.

The researchers concluded that in preschool age children, “an intensive 6-month behavioral skills-based intervention is necessary to reduce obesity.” Counseling parents about diet and exercise is not enough. Changing a child’s diet and activity level may require teaching parents behavioral management skills and specifically modeling those skills in the home.

This study was sponsored by the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences of the National Institutes of Health, and the National Institutes of Health. The authors report no conflicts of interest.

The Journal of Pediatrics. Published January 2018.