



October 2013: Head Start and Childhood Obesity

Background

According to the 2013 Program Information Report, when children enrolled in Head Start during the 2012-2013 school year, 13.2% were overweight and 15.3% were obese. These numbers reflect a national concern and a reality. In nearly every Head Start program many very young children are starting out with unhealthy habits and health concerns that could affect them throughout their entire lives. There are also health concerns about adults in Head Start communities; a study conducted in 2012 by researchers at Temple University found that among participating Pennsylvania Head Start staff, about 37% were obese. While [recent CDC findings](#) are promising, parents and programs need strategies and resources to address and promote healthy weight among children and among the adults who are their role models.

To meet this need for information and resources, NHTSA and the [Head Start National Center on Health](#) will be hosting a Head Start Health Institute on Weight and Wellness, a day-long event on December 9th, 2013 in Atlanta, GA, prior to NHTSA's Parent Conference. The Health Institute on Weight and Wellness will provide participants with strategies they can implement in their programs and communities for (1) improving nutrition and exercise for children, (2) creating adult health initiatives, and (3) communicating productively with parents and others about weight issues. The event will be designed for parents, family service workers, health and nutrition coordinators, as well as other interested Head Start and Early Head Start staff. All the organizations and researchers in the rest of this research blast will be joining us to present their work, as well as many more! [Registration is open now](#). We hope you can join us.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control

The CDC and many other government agencies are concerned about childhood weight and wellness and have put out a range of resources for parents and programs. In addition to [facts and science](#) about childhood obesity from the CDC, check out [MyPlate](#) from the USDA (link may not work until the shutdown ends), and First Lady Michelle Obama's [Let's Move! Child Care](#) initiative that has already recognized numerous Head Start programs for their efforts.

Cooking Matters at the Store

The National Head Start Association has proudly partnered with Share our Strength to connect

young children to healthy food by offering Cooking Matters at the Store mini-grants to reach 10,000 Head Start families this year! Cooking Matters at the Store is an interactive grocery store tour that teaches families to shop for healthy, affordable food as part of the No Kid Hungry campaign, working to connecting kids at risk of hunger in America with the healthy food they need every day. Programs can apply for multiple grants - one for every 25 families that are reached. [Register your program today!](#)

Go NAP SACC

The Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC) program was created in 2002 by a team of child obesity researchers at UNC Chapel Hill in association with colleagues in the Nutrition Services branch at the North Carolina Division of Public Health. The Go NAP SACC self-assessments help early care and education programs compare their nutrition and physical activity practices to best practice standards. The assessments employ the most up-to-date research on how early care and education programs can help children ages 0 to 5 develop healthy eating and activity habits. Take the [self-assessments](#) today to see how your program is doing!

EatSleepPlay

In cooperation with the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Children's Museum of Manhattan has created the EatSleepPlay early childhood curriculum that focuses on establishing or improving nutritional and dietary habits, developing positive sleep routines and increasing physical activity. NIH and USDA are currently reviewing the curriculum to be the first federally approved early childhood obesity prevention curriculum; once approved, the curriculum will be available for free. Right now, CMOM's health educators are using the EatSleepPlay curriculum to help build the capacity of local Head Start centers and support administrators, social workers, food service staff, teachers and parents in developing knowledge and behaviors to pass on to children that will result in healthier habits and more active lifestyles. [Learn more today!](#)

Salud America!

Salud America! The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Research Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children is a national online network of researchers, community group leaders, decision-makers, and members of the public working together to support healthy policy and environmental changes that can help reverse the Latino childhood obesity epidemic. *Salud America!* serves as a clearinghouse—with news, research, maps, videos, resources, and successful stories of change—on making healthy changes in Latino communities across the nation. [Check out their resources!](#)

National Black Child Development Institute

Across communities, there are varied attitudes and experiences around eating, exercising, weight, and wellness. The NBCDI has prepared two recent documents that may be of value to programs: a [Cultural Competence Improvement Tool](#) that can be used to evaluate and adapt curricula and a [Family Engagement Events Handbook](#) with step by step instructions for activities designed by their Promoting Healthy Practices Project.

Research

[Childhood Obesity: Beginning the Dialogue on Reversing the Epidemic](#)

by Sandra Hassink

Though not a research study, this congressional testimony by Dr. Sandra Hassink on behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics presents a thorough description of the context for work on children's health and weight. Dr. Hassink addresses the variation in overweight and obesity rates by age, race, and family income, and the added risk for life-long health concerns that face many children who are obese. One central message to her testimony is that there is no single cause of childhood obesity but that a child's weight status is influenced by individual characteristics and risk factors; parenting styles and family characteristics; and community, demographic, and societal characteristics.

Dr. Hassink will be presenting a keynote address at the Health Institute, and the American Academy of Pediatrics will also be hosting a session on their resources.

[Reaching Staff, Parents, and Community Partners to Prevent Childhood Obesity in Head Start, 2008](#)

by Rachel Gooze, Cayce Hughes, Daniel Finkelstein, and Robert Whitaker for Preventing Chronic Disease

While the challenge of helping all children to have healthy habits may sometimes seem enormous, the discussion of what resources are needed must begin with an understanding of what resources exist. This article describes a survey completed by 1,583 Head Start programs in 2008 and the breadth of existing efforts to address childhood nutrition and gross motor activity through program activities and collaboration with community partners. The vast majority of programs had training for staff about both feeding children and gross motor activity as well as parent education around these topics, though the exact nature of the training and educational materials varied.

More recent work from this group of researchers has focused on adults - both parents and staff - who are role models for Head Start children and how the eating competence of those adults influences children. We look forward to their presentation on the subject at the Health Institute on Weight and Wellness!

["Eat Healthy, Stay Active!": A Coordinated Intervention to Improve Nutrition and Physical Activity Among Head Start Parents, Staff, and Children](#)

by Ariella Herman, Bergen Nelson, Carol Teutsch, and Paul Chung for the American Journal of Health Promotion

Obesity among children and adults seems to call for interventions for all age groups, and this article describes results of a pilot study conducted in six Head Start programs across five states that used the family obesity prevention program "Eat Healthy, Stay Active!" The program

included training for Head Start staff, activities with parents, and daily activities with children. Following the intervention, 14.4% of previously obese adults were no longer obese and 38.2% of children who were considered obese were no longer obese. There was also a statistically significant association between parent weight loss and child weight loss. While this was a quasi-experimental study without a control group, the research is promising and is the basis for further work by the authors.

Dr. Herman will be presenting a keynote address at the Health Institute and leading a session on the initiative her team has developed.

Discussion Questions

1. Take a look at your program's data from the past year. What percentage of children were underweight, overweight, or obese?
 2. In the study conducted by Gooze et al, their survey found that "47% of program directors perceived that obesity was a large or very large problem for parents, 33% perceived that obesity was a large or very large problem for staff, and 20% perceived it was a large or very large problem for children." How do these reflect the concerns in your community?
 3. What initiatives has your program undertaken in the past to address nutrition, exercise, weight, and wellness? What has been most successful? How could the resources above reinvigorate your efforts?
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Do you know of other recent research that may be of interest to the Head Start field? Do you have other questions, comments or concerns? E-mail Emmalie Dropkin (edropkin@nhsa.org).