

When Parents Encourage Their Children to Diet, the Harmful Consequences Can Cross Generations

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Those of us who practice primary care or oversee programs for children who are overweight or obese are frequently asked if it is ok for parents to stress to these children the importance of their trying to diet and lose weight.

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Those of us who practice primary care or oversee programs for children who are overweight or obese are frequently asked if it is ok for parents to stress to these children the importance of their trying to diet and lose weight. It seems reasonable for parents to want to do this, but sadly prior studies say this may only make weight gain more rather than less of a problem for these older children and teens. Yet while such studies often look at the immediate consequences of parental encouragement for

dieting, there may be longer consequences based on the findings of a study by Berge et al.

([10.1542/peds.2017-2955](#)) being released this week in our journal. The authors used data from a longitudinal population-based study of teens, 556 of whom were followed into adulthood and for many parenthood. These adults who had been told by their parents to diet grew up with a higher risk of being overweight or obese, demonstrated abnormal eating behaviors, had less satisfaction with their bodies, and in turn pushed their children to also diet, extending the cycle of eating and weight-gain behaviors into a subsequent generation.

What can we do about this? Drs. Katherine Bauer, Julie Lumeng, and Kendrin Sonneville from the University of Michigan offer a commentary ([10.1542/peds.2018-0233](#)) that helps us better focus on helping parents who we know want to protect their children from the social and health-related consequences of becoming overweight or obese, but do so in a pejorative way. The authors provide suggestions and alternative parenting strategies, and suggest that we talk openly with parents about not pushing dieting as much as some parents do, so that the unfortunate generational outcomes captured in the Berge et al. study do not sustain into future generations. This article and commentary may change how you chat with families about what they say and do for their children who are overweight or obese. There is plenty of food for thought in both articles, so link to them and learn more.

- [The Mediterranean Diet and ADHD in Children and Adolescents](#)
- [A Varied and Diverse Diet Can Lead to Increasing BMI for Poor Children](#)
- [Diet, Exercise, and Endothelial Function in Obese Adolescents](#)
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