



Lifestyle Interventions in the Treatment of Childhood Overweight: A Meta-Analytic Review of Randomized Controlled Trials

Childhood overweight and obesity is associated with diverse physical and psychosocial problems that often persist into adulthood. However, evidence also points towards the success of weight loss treatments for overweight youth. Here active treatment is defined as “a lifestyle intervention involving any combination of diet, physical activity, and/or behavioural treatment recommendations.” Overall, the primary aim of the study was “to use meta-analytic techniques to quantitatively evaluate the efficacy of lifestyle interventions in the treatment of paediatric overweight by comparing lifestyle interventions to waitlist/no treatment control groups or information/education-only control groups.”

A total of 14 studies were included in this meta-analysis. Overall, the meta-analysis points towards the efficacy of lifestyle interventions as they produced significant effects when compared to no-treatment wait-list control groups. Following the encouraging results from this meta-analysis, the researchers made the following recommendations for future paediatric weight loss studies:

1. To adopt standard guidelines for sufficient follow-up assessment time points at one-year post-randomisation and also, ideally, at 24 months post-randomisation
2. Recommend that studies of paediatric weight loss use measures that take into account changes in height since the measurement of weight outcomes in paediatric populations is complicated by the fact that weight naturally changes as a child grows
3. Recommend increased attention to the analysis and reporting of results that would improve the meaningfulness of research findings to clinicians

Overall, the results from this meta-analysis are encouraging and show that “lifestyle interventions for the treatment of paediatric overweight produce significant and clinically meaningful changes in weight status in the short-term as compared to wait-list/information-only controls.”

Reference: Wilfley DE, Tibbs TL, Van Buren DJ, Reach KP, Walker MS, Epstein LH. Lifestyle Interventions in the Treatment of Childhood Overweight: A Meta-Analytic Review of Randomized Controlled Trials. *Health Psychol.* 2007;26(5):521-532.