Treatment of obesity, with a dietary component, and eating disorder risk in children and adolescents: A systematic review with meta-analysis

Extensive research has been done to study the comorbidities associated with childhood obesity. Lifestyle interventions are often selected as the first-line treatment for childhood obesity and often are a combination of dietary, physical activity and behavioural components. However, this can lead to other challenges, as “dieting has been associated with an increased risk of disordered eating and the development of eating disorders in observational studies.” As a consequence, the aim of this systematic review with meta-analysis was “to assess the impact of obesity treatment, with a dietary component, on the prevalence of eating disorder, eating disorder risk and related symptoms in children and adolescents with overweight or obesity.”

This study appears to be the first to examine changes in eating disorder-related outcomes following treatments for childhood obesity. Overall, the review seems to show that “a reduction in the prevalence of eating disorders, eating disorder risk and in a range of eating disorder-related symptoms, including bulimic symptoms, binge eating, emotional eating, drive for thinness and eating concern, post-intervention and/or follow-up of up to 6 years from baseline.” These initial results are promising, but further research is needed to better understand “the relationship between dieting and eating disorder risk in the context of obesity treatment for children and adolescents, and in those who withdraw from treatment.”