Bright Bodies: Helping New Haven Children Lose Weight

“(...we) use a non-diet approach to weight management. Rather than putting the children on diets, we teach them about how to make good food choices in general. For example, we’ll talk about how pretzels are a better choice than chips and how they can drink Crystal Light instead of juice. We try to avoid talking about ‘bad’ foods, instead focusing on healthier choices.”

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CARE Tips

- Increase exercise with children by encouraging play and limiting TV.
- Eat healthy by reducing foods that have saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol. Don’t buy “junk foods” and limit fast food.
- Do not use food as a reward.

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Children in New Haven and throughout the United States are getting heavier. Too much weight gain can bring health problems in early adulthood. The Bright Bodies program focuses on empowering the family to improve their health by teaching skills for smart eating and increased activity.

The study compared whether a family-based weight management program was better in lowering overweight children’s body mass index (BMI) than regular care at a health clinic. Overweight children ages 8 to 16 years old of mixed ethnic groups were recruited from the New Haven area. Families in the Bright Bodies program attended nutrition and exercise sessions together.

After one year, health improved for the children who participated in the Bright Bodies program, but worsened among children who received regular care.

• Bright Bodies children maintained their weight and decreased their BMI, body fat (-8 pounds of fat), cholesterol and insulin.
• Those in traditional care gained weight (+17 pounds), increased their BMI, body fat (+12 pounds of fat), cholesterol and insulin.

**Bottom Line**

Weight management programs that involve both parents and children help children to decrease body fat and reduce health problems related to being overweight.

**Definitions**

**Body mass index (BMI)** measures body fat based on height and weight and determines if a person is considered normal weight, overweight or obese.

**Insulin** is a natural hormone made by the pancreas organ. Insulin controls the level of the sugar (or glucose) in the blood and helps cells use this sugar for energy. Cells can’t use glucose without insulin.