

Kids whose **mothers** eat a healthy diet, exercise, do not smoking, maintain a healthy weight, and drink in light amounts, are **75% less** likely to be **FAT**



- A mother's lifestyle is more connected to whether or not children become obese than children's health behavior, according to a new study.
 - That study found that kids of moms who engaged in five healthy behaviors were 75% less likely to develop obesity.
 - These behaviors included eating a healthy diet, exercising, not smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, and drinking in light to moderate amounts.
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The best thing mothers can do to ensure their kids avoid developing obesity maybe to take care of themselves.

That's the main takeaway from a [study looking at mothers and children published Wednesday](#) in the British Medical Journal. Childhood obesity rates have more than tripled in the US since the 1970s, [according to the CDC](#). Nearly 20% of kids and teens aged 6 to 19 now qualify as obese.

Being obese as a child comes with serious long-term health effects, including higher risk for diseases including asthma, bone and joint problems, sleep apnea, type 2 diabetes, depression, and risk factors for heart disease. According to the study, genetics play an important role in obesity, but researchers think lifestyle factors may be behind the increased rate in recent decades.

So the study authors decided to analyze lifestyle choices of mothers and children to see how they affected obesity rates.

It turns out the lifestyle of mothers is significantly connected to whether or not children become obese, as determined by body mass index (BMI), a measurement of height and weight. (BMI is considered an [imperfect gauge of obesity on an individual scale](#), but a [valid way to measure obesity rates](#) among larger populations.)

Mothers with healthy lifestyles were more likely to have children who avoided obesity. But the degree to which these behaviors made a difference may still be surprising.

Children of mothers who followed five healthy lifestyle choices were a full 75% less likely to be obese.



Five healthy behaviors

Obesity risk is lowest for children whose mothers make five healthy lifestyle choices. These mothers maintain a healthy weight, [exercise at least the recommended 150 minutes per week](#), and don't smoke. They eat a high quality diet, determined by high intake of vegetables, fruits, nuts, whole grains, healthy fats, and low consumption of sugary beverages, red and processed meat. Finally, they drink light to moderate amounts, quantified as two small glasses of wine or one standard pint of beer a day.

The study authors used data from two research initiatives — the Nurses' Health Study II (NHSII) and Growing Up Today Study (GUTS) — that provided detailed data on 24,289 children aged 9-14 born to 16,945 women.

An average of five years after the initial data was collected, just over 5% of the children had become obese. The biggest contributing factor was whether or not mothers maintained a healthy weight — children of mothers whose BMI qualified as obese were more than three times as likely to become obese. Smoking status played a big role too, with non-smokers children 31% less likely to become obese.

All in all, maternal lifestyle was more connected to whether or not a child developed obesity than children's lifestyle — though if both mothers and children engaged in a healthy lifestyle (eating well and exercising), the researchers found those kids were 82% less likely to become obese.



Dads and other factors

This most recent study was an observational one, so the authors can't be sure that maternal behavior *causes* children to maintain a healthy body weight, they just can say that the children of mothers who have a healthy lifestyle are less likely to be obese. But [other studies](#) confirm that maternal lifestyle has a big impact on children's lifestyles.

Still, there are a lot of other questions to answer. Since the mothers in this study were all female nurses, they tend to be a healthy and educated population, and their kids are significantly less likely to be obese than the rest of the population in general. Data from a wider swath of the US population would be helpful.

Plus, all of the information in this study is self-reported. There may be some inaccuracy in people's reporting of their diet, exercise habits, or alcohol consumption, though the general trends would likely remain the same.

We also need studies that show how paternal lifestyle might impact kids, the authors write in the study.

Still, the fact that children of mothers who engage in these five behaviors are 75% less likely to develop obesity is a huge deal. It indicates that one of the best ways to combat child obesity might be to make sure mothers are healthy in the first place.



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