Parenting Quality and Child Weight Status

Michelle Zitt and Gail P. A. Kauwell

Childhood obesity is a complex problem with no simple solution. Determining what puts children at risk for becoming overweight is vital, but there is still much we do not know. Contrary to popular belief, diet and exercise are not the only factors contributing to the issue. In fact, family environment and parental behaviors may also affect a child’s weight and future health status. To learn more about the link between parental behaviors and childhood obesity, researchers recently looked at the relationship between parenting quality and children’s weight status, reporting their findings in a nutrition journal.

Parenting quality was assessed using a test that measures supportive and nurturing behaviors. Children of parents with higher parenting quality scores tended to have higher physical activity levels and to engage in less screen time, like watching TV or playing video games. In turn, higher activity levels and less screen time were linked to healthier weights (McConly et al., 2010). Based on other findings, the researchers speculate that happier, more positive parents are also probably more able to prepare healthful meals and engage in more active play, which can help children maintain a healthy weight (Burke, 2003; Cummings & Davies, 1994; Lovejoy et al., 2000; Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 1997).

This research suggests that positive, happy, and supportive parents are more likely to promote behaviors that are linked to a healthier body weight. Helping parents to develop good parenting skills, finding ways to increase physical activity and to reduce screen time, and teaching them ways to foster good dietary habits can have lasting health benefits for the whole family (McConly et al., 2010).

References


