

Study finds higher adherence to dash-style diet reduces excess weight gain in adolescent girls

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Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM) researchers found that girls who followed the Dietary Approach to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet pattern had a lower incidence of excess weight gain as measured by body mass index (BMI) over the 10-year period of their adolescence. These findings are reported in the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

Obesity is a major public health problem, with 17 percent of American children overweight and 67 percent of adults either overweight or obese. [Excess weight](#) during childhood leads to numerous health problems and is even associated with premature death as an adult. Few studies have examined the relation of food-based dietary patterns with [weight gain](#), especially in children.

The researchers, led by Jonathan Berz MD, MSc, an assistant professor of medicine at BUSM, used data from the National Growth and Health Study to examine the effects of adherence to a DASH-style eating plan and its components on the change in (BMI) in a racially diverse sample of adolescent girls.

The DASH diet emphasizes increased intake of low-fat dairy products, fish, chicken, and lean meats, and nuts, fruits, whole grains, vegetables, and legumes. Thomas Moore, MD, professor of medicine at BUSM, and associate provost and director of the Office of Clinical Research for

Boston University Medical Campus, was the chair of the steering committee that created the DASH diet and is the senior author of The DASH Diet for [Hypertension](#).

The National Growth and Health Study was initiated by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute to investigate racial differences in dietary, physical activity, family, and psychosocial factors associated with the development of obesity in black and white girls. The study cohort enrolled 2,379 girls aged nine and 10 years in three cities starting in 1987 to 1988 who were followed for the next 10 years.

"We created a modified DASH food-group score and focused on the seven DASH-related food groups," said Berz. "We found that study participants with the highest intake of DASH-like food groups had the smallest gains in BMI over time and the lowest BMIs at the end of follow-up, and those with the lowest DASH food pattern score (representing lowest adherence) had a mean BMI that was greater than the threshold for overweight as defined by the 85th percentile by age."

"The DASH eating pattern is endorsed by the USDA and others but very few studies have looked at its potential benefit in children or [adolescents](#)," said Lynn Moore, DSc, senior investigator for the study. "This study is important because it shows that a very simple dietary message focused primarily on increasing intakes of fruits and vegetables and low-fat dairy products has the potential to reduce the risk of overweight and obesity in adolescent [girls](#)," she added

More information: Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2011;165[6]:540-546.

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