

Children who are leaner report eating more polyunsaturated fatty acids

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The results of a recent study show that children who report eating more polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs), found in tree nuts, seeds and fatty fish, and consume a higher ratio of PUFA: saturated fatty acids (SFAs), have more lean body mass, lower percent body fat, and less intra-abdominal fat (belly fat).

The study was published in *The Journal of Nutrition* and conducted by researchers at the University of Colorado Anschutz Health and Wellness Center and the University of Colorado School of Medicine at the Anschutz Medical Campus in Aurora, Colo. in collaboration with the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

The study looked at a group of racially diverse children ages 7-12 (39% European-American, 34% African-American, and 27% Hispanic-American). Each child, with parental supervision, provided two separate self-reports of their 24-hour dietary intakes.

"Studies have identified a variety of benefits of including PUFAs into an adult's diet, particularly omega-3 fatty acids," said Michelle Cardel, PhD, RD, the study's lead author. "Our data suggests that consumption of PUFAs is associated with improved body composition in diverse groups of children. It's important to note, however, that this study was cross-sectional and no causation can be concluded. Randomized experiments are needed to confirm these findings."

Each child's [body composition](#) and abdominal fat distribution were measured by dual energy x-ray absorptiometry and computed tomography scans, respectively. Those who ate more PUFAs and had a higher ratio of PUFA: SFAs in their reported diet were found to be leaner, have less [body fat](#) and less abdominal adiposity.

"Hopefully this work will stimulate additional research to determine if there is a causal

relationship between dietary PUFAs, body fat and lean mass in kids," Cardel said. "Until then, children should consume [fatty fish](#), such as salmon, twice a week to reach Institute of Medicine recommendations for omega-3 fatty acids."

Cardel is a nutrition scientist and registered dietitian. She plans to continue her research exploring the environmental, behavioral, social, dietary, and genetic factors that influence the development of obesity in diverse groups of children.

Provided by University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus

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