

Being teased about weight linked to more weight gain among children, study suggests

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Youth who said they were teased or ridiculed about their weight increased their body mass by 33 percent more each year, compared to a similar group who had not been teased, according to researchers at the National Institutes of Health. The findings appear to contradict the belief that such teasing might motivate youth to change their behavior and attempt to lose weight.

The study was conducted by Natasha A. Schvey, Ph.D., of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, MD, and colleagues at NIH's Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. It appears in *Pediatric Obesity*.

The study involved 110 youth who were an average of 11.8 years of age when they enrolled. The participants were either overweight (defined as a [body mass](#) index above the 85th percentile) when they began the study or had two parents who were overweight or obese. At enrollment, they completed a six-item questionnaire on whether they had been teased about their weight. They then participated in annual followup visits for the next 15 years.

The researchers found that youth experiencing high levels of teasing gained an average of .20 kg (.44 lbs) per year more than those who did not. The authors theorize that weight-associated stigma may have made youths more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors, such as binge eating and avoiding exercise. Another [possible explanation](#) is that the stress of being teased could stimulate the release of the hormone cortisol, which may lead to weight gain.

More information: Schvey, NA. Weight-based teasing is associated with gain in BMI and fat mass among children and adolescents at risk for obesity: a longitudinal study. *Pediatric Obesity*. 2019.

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