

Does Snacking Help Curb Childhood Obesity?

Suarez, G.¹, Moon, J.¹, Denny, R.¹, Brown, G.¹, Wagner, D.¹, Irani, C.², Medina, E.³, Baum, M.¹

¹ Loma Linda University School of Medicine, Loma Linda, CA, United States

² Institute for Community Partnerships, Loma Linda University Health, Loma Linda, CA, United States

³ Loma Linda University School of Public Health, Loma Linda, CA, United States

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES:

According to the California Department of Education, students who are in Grade levels 5, 7, and 9, are near 48% overweight or obese. This is more than double what the national prevalence according to the Center for Disease Control. Unhealthy weight for this study is defined as overweight >85% BMI and obesity >95% BMI and is a serious problem that can lead to poor health, starting earlier in children. This study aims to assess a possible correlation between boredom and snacking to overweight and obesity using Body Mass Index (BMI).

METHODS: Children between the ages of 9-15 years were referred by a physician from a local federally qualified health center in San Bernardino to “Operation Fit”, a weeklong day camp, based on their unhealthy weight (BMI > 85th percentile). In this program, 113 children participated in a group that was taught with interactive nutrition and physical activity lessons. Parents participated in a survey for lifestyle practices, including a question about boredom and snacking, with a parent education session at the end of the camp. These answers were then compared to their child’s BMI using logistic regression models.

RESULTS: In response to the statement “If I am bored, I will snack more” there was a

statistical significance for those that responded they do not snack.

| Variable | P-value | OR | 95% CI |
|----------|---------|-------|-----------------|
| Age | 0.1701 | 0.851 | (0.676 – 1.071) |
| Gender | 0.3091 | 1.512 | (0.682 – 3.254) |
| Race | 0.8204 | 1.131 | (0.392 – 3.264) |
| Language | 0.6881 | 0.832 | (0.338 – 2.047) |
| BMI | 0.0258* | 0.401 | (0.180-0.895) |

*Significant at p<0.05 n=113

CONCLUSIONS: Those that agree with snacking when bored are 0.401 times more likely to have children that are overweight than those who disagree. These results can be used in school systems to teach parents that the use of snacks in the correct way—as opposed to when bored—can help reduce the risk of gaining weight in children. This may also lead to the conclusion that healthy snacking habits can be used to help lower overweight and obese children, helping with reducing the additional risks with being overweight.

Accepted for Publication: Mar 2020

The authors have no funding, financial relationships, or conflicts of interest to disclose.

Send correspondence to: gsuarez@llu.edu