

Study: Mindfulness Might Help Prevent Childhood Obesity

A new study suggests that mindfulness can be effective in combatting obesity in children.

By Hollee Actman Becker



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I used to be a hardcore yoga devotee and there was a lot of talk in my classes about "mindfulness," a practice derived from Buddhist meditation that involves paying attention to the present moment, free of distracting thoughts about the past or future.

As a mom of two young kids, I saw mindfulness as a welcome respite from all the hubbub of my day-to-day. There's no denying I left class each day feeling lighter, the stress of being a new mom a distant memory, left discarded on my mat, at least for one or two hours.

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Mindfulness has long played an important role in helping people deal with stress. Now there's a new [study that suggests the practice can actually help treat and prevent obesity in children](#) by helping them control the impulse to overeat.

Interesting.

The study looked at the eating behavior and brain function (using MRI) of 38 children, five who were considered obese and six who were overweight. "We wanted to look at the way (their) brains function in more detail so we can better understand what is happening neurologically in children who are overweight and obese," said author BettyAnn Chodkowski.

Here's what they found: The results showed a preliminary link between weight, eating behavior, and balance in brain function. In children who behave in ways that make them eat more, the part of the brain associated with being impulsive appears to be more strongly connected than the part of the brain associated with inhibition. Which basically means that brains of children who are obese exhibit an "imbalance" between food-seeking and food-avoiding behaviors.

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"We think mindfulness could recalibrate the imbalance in the brain connections associated with childhood obesity," said co-author Dr. Ronald Cowan. "Mindfulness has produced mixed results in adults, but so far there have been few studies showing its effectiveness for weight loss in children."

Well, it's worth a try, right?

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