



[National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute \(NHLBI\)](#)

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NIH-funded studies aim to prevent, treat childhood obesity

Researchers will also evaluate strategies for children, communities, homes, and schools

The National Institutes of Health is launching two major research efforts, totaling \$72.5 million, to examine ways to curtail the nation's childhood obesity epidemic. One will study long-term approaches to prevent or treat childhood obesity, and the other will examine community efforts to reduce childhood obesity rates.

"Childhood obesity is a major public health concern. If we don't curb this widespread problem, our country will see a substantial increase in cardiovascular disease and other health issues in the years ahead," said Susan B. Shurin, M.D., acting director of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), the lead sponsor for both programs. "Childhood is the optimal time to encourage healthy habits that kids can practice the rest of their lives."

The NIH's \$49.5 million Childhood Obesity Prevention and Treatment Research (COPTR) program is among the first long-term obesity prevention and treatment research studies in children. Two obesity prevention and two obesity treatment randomized clinical trials will be conducted over seven years. COPTR is sponsored by the NHLBI, the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), and the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR). COPTR will test methods for preventing excessive weight gain in non-overweight and moderately overweight youth, and methods for reducing weight in obese and severely obese youth. Investigators will collaborate with local, state, and national organizations on these efforts.

The two obesity prevention trials will develop and test approaches that target home, community, and primary care settings for preschool children living in low income and ethnically diverse neighborhoods. The two obesity treatment trials will examine obesity therapies on overweight and obese children 7 to 14 years old in school and home settings in collaboration with local youth organizations.

COPTR differs from previous childhood obesity research programs as the new studies will test long-term intervention approaches and target multiple levels of influence — community youth organizations, schools, primary care providers, home, and families — and do not focus solely on individuals' behaviors.

COPTR studies will be conducted at:

- Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Nashville (Principal Investigator: Shari L. Barkin, M.D., MSHS)
- Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland (Principal Investigator: Leona Cuttler, M.D.)
- Stanford University, Palo Alto, Calif. (Principal Investigator: Thomas N. Robinson, M.D., M.P.H.)
- University of Minnesota, Twin Cities (Principal Investigator: Simone French, Ph.D.)

The coordinating center for the program is University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (Principal Investigator: June Stevens, Ph.D.)

Another large research study will evaluate existing community efforts to reduce local childhood obesity rates. The NIH has

awarded a five-year, \$23 million contract to Battelle Memorial Institute (Principal Investigator: Howard Fishbein, MPH., Ph.D.) in Columbus, Ohio, to examine community programs and policies in 300 demographically diverse communities across the nation. The community efforts to be evaluated are those designed to decrease local childhood obesity rates in areas where childhood obesity rates are highest. Investigators will examine how effective such efforts are in changing behaviors and reducing body weight.

"Over the past several years, communities across the United States have been implementing programs and policies to encourage healthier eating, increase opportunities for physical activity, and other steps to reverse increasing rates of childhood obesity," noted Denise Simons-Morton, Ph.D., director of the NHLBI's Division for the Application of Research Discoveries. "This study will evaluate such community programs to determine which of them or their components are the most promising approaches for improving children's obesity-related health behaviors and weight."

The NHLBI is the lead sponsor of the community evaluation study, which also receives support from the NIH's NICHD, National Cancer Institute (NCI), National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), and OBSSR.

The project is also part of a robust set of activities to address childhood obesity in the United States conducted with the National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (NCCOR). Members of the NCCOR are the NIH, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the United States Department of Agriculture.

Obesity rates have increased four-fold among children in the past 40 years. Today, 17 percent of U.S. children and adolescents are obese. Factors behind this increase are believed to include increased consumption of high-calorie food and drinks and less physical activity during and after school. Overweight and obese children are at higher risk of chronic diseases during childhood and adulthood, including heart disease, stroke, asthma, type 2 diabetes, and several cancers. Cardiovascular conditions associated with obesity, such as high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol, are increasingly being diagnosed during childhood, as is type 2 diabetes.

To interview an NHLBI spokesperson, contact the NHLBI Communications Office at 301-496-4236 or at nhlbi_news@nhlbi.nih.gov. To interview an NICHD spokesperson, contact the NICHD Public Information and Communications Branch at 301-496-5133. To interview an NIDDK spokesperson, contact the NIDDK Office of Communications and Public Liaison at 301-496-3583 or at niddkmedia@mail.nih.gov. To interview an NCI spokesperson, contact the NCI Office of Media Relations at 301-496-6641 or at ncipressofficers@mail.nih.gov. To interview an OBSSR spokesperson, contact the OBSSR communications specialist at 301-594-4574 or at annb@nih.gov.

The NHLBI plans, conducts, and supports research related to the causes, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of heart, blood vessel, lung, and blood diseases; and sleep disorders. The Institute also administers national health education campaigns on women and heart disease, healthy weight for children, and other topics. NHLBI press releases and other materials are available online at www.nhlbi.nih.gov.

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) leads the National Cancer Program and the NIH effort to dramatically reduce the burden of cancer and improve the lives of cancer patients and their families, through research into prevention and cancer biology, the development of new interventions, and the training and mentoring of new researchers. For more information about cancer, please visit the NCI website at <http://www.cancer.gov>.

The Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) sponsors research on development, before and after birth; maternal, child, and family health; reproductive biology and population issues; and medical rehabilitation. For more information, visit the Institute's website at <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/>.

The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, part of NIH, conducts and supports basic and clinical research and research training on some of the most common, severe and disabling conditions affecting Americans. The Institute's research interests include: diabetes and other endocrine and metabolic diseases; digestive diseases, nutrition, and obesity; and kidney, urologic and hematologic diseases. For more information, visit www.niddk.nih.gov.

The Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR)'s mission is to stimulate behavioral and social sciences research throughout NIH and to integrate these areas of research more fully into others of the NIH health research enterprise, thereby improving our understanding, treatment, and prevention of disease. For more information, please visit <http://obsr.od.nih.gov>.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) — *The Nation's Medical Research Agency* — includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the primary federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.

Resources:

- What Are Overweight and Obesity? http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/obe/obe_whatare.html
- National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research: <http://www.nccor.org>
- Aim for a Healthy Weight: <http://healthyweight.nhlbi.nih.gov>
- Clinical Guidelines on the Identification, Evaluation, and Treatment of Overweight and Obesity in Adults: The Evidence Report: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/obesity/ob_gdlns.htm

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