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Does Daycare Affect Kids' Weight?

Posted By [Sue Shellenbarger](#) On January 14, 2009 @ 8:00 am In [Global](#) | [25 Comments](#)

Associated Press

As many adults work to lose extra post-holiday pounds, some worry that time in child care or preschool will make their kids chubby, too.

Recent research bears some good news: Only a few kinds of nonparental care are linked to overweight children. Informal daycare by relatives, friends, sitters or neighbors correlates with a higher chance of a child's being obese by kindergarten, compared with children in their parents' care, says [a recent study in the journal "Pediatrics."](#) Care by grandparents, in particular, was cited, perhaps because grandparents may tend to be more sedentary, or to indulge their grandchildren with snacks or TV. But time spent in child-care centers and family child-care homes wasn't linked to weight gain, says the study by researchers affiliated with the University of Washington, Seattle.

One reason may be that child-care centers are placing greater emphasis on fitness and nutrition. Local or regional exercise and good-diet initiatives have sprung up in [New York](#), [California](#), [North Carolina](#), [Oregon](#) and [Nebraska](#).

Mark Ginsberg, executive director of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, a professional group, sees "a growing crescendo" of interest in improving nutrition and training staff to instill a love of exercise in kids. Some centers are outsourcing exercise programs, such as [JumpBunch](#), which has grown to 33 franchises since its 2002 founding, says founder Tom Bunchman. Most kids need an hour of unstructured physical play, and another hour of structured activity, each day.

And staffers are being trained, for example, not to pressure or bribe kids to clean their plates, offer food for comfort or as an inducement to behave, or deny it as a punishment. Also, children should have their meals with small groups of friends; [one study](#) found kids, like animals, consume 30% more when they eat in larger groups of nine, rather than smaller groups of three people.

Readers, how well does your child-care provider do on this front? Has daycare led to changes in your child's weight or fitness? Have you found a good way to suggest improvements?

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