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Lifestyle program helps Phoenix teens improve health and grades (Video)



It's the best health news in a decade concerning children and obesity. Officials say childhood obesity rates are declining in several cities across the U.S., a sign that the overall obesity epidemic may be reversing course. (on.aol.com)



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A **lifestyle program** headed by a former ASU professor has been shown to help teenagers lose weight and become less depressed while their grades and social skills improved. The study, called the COPE TEEN program, involved 779 mostly Hispanic students ages 14 -16 attending 11 Phoenix-area high schools. They were randomly assigned to a COPE or standard health education classes.

The study, funded by a grant from the **National Institute of Nursing Research**,

part of the National Institutes of Health, is one of the first to show that a school-based program can bring about health and academic improvements. The program taught students skills to help them avoid or address overweight or obesity, poor mental health, and low academic grades.

For example, students engaged in physical activities that included kickboxing, walking, and dancing. They received pedometers that measured their steps every day and let them record and view their increased walking activities outside of class. They were taught specific skills to improve their mental health and outlook, using positive thinking, self-talk, problem-solving, and goal-setting techniques. They learned how to regulate and control their emotions and practiced effective communication.

Students also received nutrition education, including how to read food labels, portion control, and the stoplight (or traffic light) **diet**, which emphasizes red, yellow, and green foods. They learned how to recognize and control emotional eating.

Each intervention program lasted for 15 weeks. Students were examined six months after they completed it, and comparisons were made with students who received the standard health education.

- No COPE student moved into the obese category, compared to three from the standard program.
- Four COPE students moved into the overweight category, compared to 15 from the standard program.
- 143 COPE students remained in the healthy weight program, compared to 187 from the standard program.
- COPE students earned high grades in their health education classes than those in the standard class.

In addition, 13% of COPE students reported using alcohol, compared to 20% from the standard group. Researchers also found that more of the students with high depression scores who were assigned to the COPE program were able to lower their scores into the normal range after finishing the program than students in the standard program.

Finally, COPE students maintained significantly lower body mass index (BMI) than students in the standard program.

"This study shows that the intervention can be a promising approach for promoting healthy lifestyles, improving psychosocial health and enhancing academic outcomes in a setting where teens spend a significant amount of time—in the classroom—and by teachers," said Bernadette Melnyk, PhD, RN, who led the study, first from ASU and later from her present post as Dean of the College of Nursing at Ohio State University, where she also serves as wellness director.

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