

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE

7 a.m. ET

March 31, 2016

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Watching videos of kids eating vegetables increases preschoolers' real-life vegetable consumption

WASHINGTON, DC – When preschoolers watch videos of other children eating vegetables, they're more likely to eat vegetables themselves, according to research being presented Friday at the Society of Behavioral Medicine's Annual Meeting & Scientific Sessions.

The research was conducted by Louisiana State University's Pennington Biomedical Research Center. It shows that peer modeling on a digital screen may be an effective tool to encourage vegetable consumption among preschool children.

After viewing a video of peers consuming a vegetable like bell peppers, children between the ages of 3 and 5 were more likely to choose to eat that vegetable when presented with it one week later. Additionally, parents of the children who saw the video of peers eating vegetables were marginally more likely to make that vegetable available in the home soon thereafter, and those children were also more likely to report a higher preference for the vegetable.

"As we work to explore easy-to-use tools to help influence children's attitudes toward healthy eating and to make it more fun and exciting, this study lays the foundation for interventions that we may be able to translate into home or school settings in the future," said Amanda Staiano, PhD, lead author on the study and assistant professor of research in Pennington Biomedical's Pediatric Obesity and Health Behavior Laboratory.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, childhood obesity has more than doubled in children and quadrupled in adolescents during the past 30 years. Research published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* shows one-third of preschoolers eat zero servings of fruit and vegetables a day. In contrast, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-20 recommends preschool-aged children eat four to six servings of fruits and vegetables each day.

For this study, researchers recruited 42 children between 3 and 5 years of age from two childcare centers. Children were randomly assigned to watch a video with a research assistant. One group watched a 7.5 minute-video of other preschool children eating and playing with a bell pepper; a second group watched a video of peers brushing their teeth; and a third group was asked to sit quietly without a video. Both the vegetable from the video and a cereal snack were made available to each child during study visits. When compared with children who did not view the vegetable video, children who were exposed to the on-screen peer modeling consumed significantly more bell pepper seven days later than did their peers who were not exposed to peer modeling. While parents of children in the peer modeling group were marginally more likely to have made bell peppers available in the home up to seven days

later, there were no significant differences in purchasing habits of bell pepper or the child's requests for bell pepper at home.

"Previous research has shown repetition is effective in modeling behavior, so in the future our research will examine the efficacy of integrating on-screen peer modeling into longer-term dietary interventions for preschoolers in the hopes of improving children's health over the long term," Staiano said.

Staiano's team will present this research Friday from 6 to 7 p.m. ET during a poster session at the Society of Behavioral Medicine's Annual Meeting & Scientific Sessions, being held in Washington, DC, at the Washington Hilton. Staiano is a society member. The research won a society Citation Award.

Full study results were published this month in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior: [http://www.jneb.org/article/S1499-4046\(16\)00069-5/abstract](http://www.jneb.org/article/S1499-4046(16)00069-5/abstract).

This study was supported by the Pennington Biomedical Research Foundation (www.pbrf.org).

The Society of Behavioral Medicine (SBM) is a 2,200-member organization of scientific researchers, clinicians and educators. They study interactions among behavior, biology and the environment, and translate findings into interventions that improve the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities (www.sbm.org).

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