

- Parenting

## Children with parents who lack warmth likelier to be obese – study

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Children whose parents lack warmth are more likely to grow up overweight or obese, according to the first study of its kind.

The effects of different parenting styles on children's weight have been determined for the first time – and suggest parental warmth is key to a healthy weight, researchers at the International Congress on Obesity in Melbourne, the biennial congress of the World Obesity Federation, will say today.

Their analysis of data on 10,000 children in the UK found authoritarian and neglectful parenting in early childhood were linked with higher weight throughout childhood and adolescence. Both types of parenting are characterised by a lack of warmth.

“The effect of parenting style on a child's weight is often considered a taboo subject,” said Alexa Segal, a researcher at the Centre for Health Economics & Policy Innovation at Imperial College London. “However, a comprehensive understanding of the associations between parenting style and childhood and adolescent obesity has great potential to inform obesity policy and contribute to the development of more effective health and nutrition programmes.”

Child obesity is a growing problem worldwide. In England, more than a quarter of four- and five-year-olds are overweight or obese. Researchers used data from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children to look at the association between parenting style during early childhood and a child's weight later in childhood and in early adolescence, late adolescence and early adulthood.

Prof Louise Baur, the president of the World Obesity Federation, said: “The world today often makes it difficult for children and families to eat well, be physically active, sleep well and cope with stress.

“Parents who are able to set appropriate limits for their child, while bringing warmth and sensitivity to the relationship, may be better able to help their child be as healthy as possible.”