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Wise Mind project: a school-based environmental approach for preventing weight gain in children.

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE: The Wise Mind pilot study compared the efficacy of an environmental approach for prevention of inappropriate weight gain in children with an active control condition that used an environmental approach for modifying expectancies related to the use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES: A total of 670 second to sixth grade students from four schools were enrolled in the study. The study spanned 2 academic years, and 586 students were available for evaluation at the end of the study. Two schools were randomly assigned to each treatment arm. The environmental approach for weight gain prevention focused on modification of eating habits and physical activity, and the active control group focused on modification of expectancies related to substance use.

RESULTS: Using an intention to treat design, the study found no differences in weight gain prevention between the two interventions. The weight gain prevention program was associated with reduction of total caloric intake, reduction of dietary fat intake, reduction of protein intake, and increased physical activity in comparison with the active control group and relative to baseline. These changes in food intake were attributed to changes in food selections that resulted from modification of school cafeteria menus and food preparation.

DISCUSSION: The Wise Mind school-based weight gain prevention program induced behavioral changes in healthy eating and physical activity but did not induce significant changes in body weight in comparison with the control arm. Recommendations for future research are provided.

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