How effective are interventions at reducing socioeconomic inequalities in obesity among children and adults? Two systematic reviews

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Plain English summary

Effectiveness of interventions at reducing inequalities in obesity

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Obesity is an increasingly common condition in the UK and is associated with diabetes, heart disease, stroke, hypertension, osteoarthritis and certain forms of cancer. Obesity levels are higher in more deprived population groups. Health professionals need to better understand what works to reduce these inequalities between social groups. We used systematic review methods to examine the effectiveness of interventions at reducing inequalities in relation to (1) adult and (2) child obesity and to examine (3) how such public health interventions are organised, implemented and delivered. Our two systematic reviews searched for all studies of interventions available worldwide; we assessed the quality of the studies and then collated and summarised the results. This makes such complex and diffuse information more accessible. Our reviews found 76 studies of inequalities in obesity in children and 103 in adults. This evidence suggested that interventions that aim to prevent, reduce or manage obesity do not increase inequalities and that some interventions reduced the social gradient in obesity or decreased obesity among more deprived groups. For children, school-delivered and environmental interventions, as well as interventions that use community empowerment mechanisms, were potentially effective in reducing obesity in more deprived areas. For adults, primary care-delivered tailored weight loss programmes and community-based weight loss interventions were the most effective, although only in the short term and mainly for low-income women. Studies were generally not of a high quality and there were few UK studies, few studies of society-wide interventions and no studies that assessed the cost of interventions. More UK studies are needed, especially of interventions among men and adolescents.
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