

Randomised controlled trial evaluating the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of 'Families for Health', a family-based childhood obesity treatment intervention delivered in a community setting for ages 6 to 11 years

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Plain English summary

The Families for Health RCT

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Plain English summary

One-third of children aged 10–11 years in England are overweight. The NHS needs programmes that work and offer good value for money for helping children who are overweight.

In this study we wanted to find out whether or not a programme called 'Families for Health' could help families with children, aged 6–11 years, who are overweight. This is a group-based programme, 10 weeks long, involving children and their parents. The programme was delivered across three areas in the West Midlands and aimed to help parents develop their parenting skills to enable them to bring about lifestyle change within the family. Four facilitators, two for the children's group and two for the parents' group, ran each programme. The facilitators included people with experience in nursing, teaching, youth work, physical activity and nutrition, who had attended a 4-day training course to run the programme.

Approximately half of our 115 families with at least one child who was overweight were invited to attend the Families for Health programme and the other half were invited to attend the usual care that was already available locally for the treatment of children who were overweight. The Families for Health programme was implemented almost as desired, with most families' experiences of the programme being positive, although some families had to wait to receive the intervention. After 12 months there were no differences in the average change in weight (as measured by the body mass index of the children), in physical activity, in fruit and vegetable consumption or in health-related quality of life (as measured by the European Quality of Life-5 Dimensions Youth version) between the Families for Health group and the usual-care group. The Families for Health intervention was also more expensive than the care available locally.

In conclusion, the Families for Health programme was found to be neither effective nor cost-effective in helping families to manage the weight of overweight children.

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