

**Evaluation of an Upper Elementary School Program
To Prevent Body Image, Eating and Weight Concerns**

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Abstract

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Body angst among females is rampant in America. It is well documented that most girls, regardless of size, become worried as pre-teens and young adolescents about fatness. In efforts to "control" their size, they frequently eat in unhealthy, restrictive, counterproductive ways that naturally leave them preoccupied with hunger, food and weight. Boys are increasingly affected. At a time when they should feel secure in their body's growth, developing confidence in habits that would help them to become healthy adults with healthy weights, American children are anxious about size and eat in dysfunctional ways that compromise their emotional and physical health.

*Body image, eating and weight concerns are extremely difficult to reverse once established. The purpose of this project was to determine whether incorporating a prevention curriculum with upper elementary school children could counteract some of the enormous social pressures that contribute to these problems before they start. The project examined the effects of the 11 lesson *Healthy Body Image: Teaching Kids to Eat and Love Their Bodies Too!* curriculum on 4th, 5th and 6th grade boys and girls. A controlled study with 415 test students measured changes in knowledge, attitudes and behavioral intentions from pre to post test related to 1) body image, 2) the biology of size, shape and restricted hunger ("dieting"), 3) body size prejudice, 4) media images, and 5) lifestyle choices. Significant improvement was noted for the test subjects in most areas. While studies have shown that prevention efforts directed at middle school children are too late, earlier education in upper elementary years may provide a foundation for students to resist pressures to conform to unhealthy attitudes and behaviors regarding weight and "dieting" as they move through the critical developmental years.*

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