Overweight Girls Don’t Always Like Themselves After Losing the Pounds

April 19, 2012

Based on all the teasing, bullying and parental nagging that overweight kids must endure, it may come as no surprise to hear that obese children and teens often suffer from low self-esteem. Even once-obese girls continue to struggle with negative body perception and low self-worth long after attaining a normal body weight—but race also appears to influence weight-related self-esteem issues, according to a new study published in the Journal of Health and Social Behavior and reported by Purdue University.

For the study, Purdue researchers analyzed the health and weight of 2,206 black and white girls over the course of 10 years, beginning when girls were 9 or 10. At varying intervals, participants evaluated their own body in relation to their idea of a preferred body and conducted self-perception profiles to examine self-esteem. Then researchers tracked participants’ body mass trends over this 10-year period and separated girls into three groups: those of normal weight, those who were no longer obese and those who were chronically obese.

The most surprising finding occurred in the “transitioned out of obesity” group. While white formerly obese girls suffered from generally negative body image and low self-esteem after shedding pounds, black girls’ self-esteem appeared to rebound more quickly after losing weight. “[For black girls] who moved into the normal weight range, self-esteem increased more than it did for any other group of girls,” said Sarah A. Mustillo, PhD, a professor of sociology at Purdue University.

To explain this finding, researchers said that racial and cultural differences could be at play. Another theory suggests that since black girls often started out with lower overall self-esteem assessments, they have more room for improvement.

Mustillo added that parents can play an important role in encouraging healthy diet and exercise—without resorting to negative remarks about a child’s weight, which could contribute to low self-esteem. Researchers advised parents to be good role models by eating well and exercising regularly themselves.

To keep meals fresh, delicious and interesting while boosting family members’ health, click here to

read about the African Heritage Diet Pyramid. This approach to organizing meals is a food-planning tool to help folks of African descent reconnect with the healthful culinary traditions of the African diaspora. The dietary guide includes foods not only from the African continent but also from the American South, the Caribbean and South America.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/weightloss-self-esteem-22269-3924