



Making Tortillas without Lard: Latino Parents' Perspectives on Healthy Eating, Physical Activity, and Weight Management Strategies for Overweight Latino Children

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Background

- Latinos continue to be most overweight racial/ethnic group of children in the US
 - ◆ 37% overweight/at risk for overweight, equivalent to 5.3 million Latino children (2003-2004 NHANES)
 - ◆ About 1 in 5 overweight, equivalent to 2.7 million Latino children
- But not enough known about what Latino parents consider to be healthy eating, physical activity, and weight management strategies for overweight children

Study Aim

- To identify Latino parents' perspectives on healthy eating, physical activity, and weight management strategies for overweight Latino children

Methods: Study Sample

- Study sample: parents of overweight/at risk for overweight Latino children in Milwaukee
- Parents recruited from Milwaukee public schools in Latino neighborhoods
- Eligibility criteria
 - ◆ Self-identified Latino ethnicity
 - ◆ Child in household has BMI \geq 85th percentile for age/gender
 - BMI calculated from child's height and weight measurements taking during home visit or visit to school health clinic

Methods: Focus Groups

- Four focus groups held with 3-8 participants per group
 - ◆ Mexican-American
 - ◆ Mexican-American immigrants
 - ◆ Puerto Rican
 - ◆ Other Latino (Central and South America, other Caribbean)
- Each participating family received \$50 honorarium, free transportation, on-site daycare, and dinner
- Focus groups conducted by trained bilingual research personnel in English or Spanish (according to parental preference)
- Parents sampled 3 healthy substitutions for traditional Latino meal items
 - ◆ Tailored to each Latino subgroup
 - ◆ Prepared by professional chef

Menu of Samples Tasted in Focus Groups by Latino Parents

6

Mexican subgroup

- Whole-wheat enchiladas with vegetables and low-fat cheese
- Frijoles (with no lard) with vegetables
- Brown rice and beans



Puerto Rican subgroup

- Skinless chicken breast with traditional seasoning
- Baked plantains with wheat germ crust
- Brown rice with beans (*habichuelas*)



Other Latinos subgroup

- Baked fish with herbs
- Skinless chicken breast with vegetables
- Brown rice with black beans



Focus Group Questions

Parents answered 32 questions and 88 probes on:

- Most important things parents and kids can do to help kids lose weight
- Helpfulness of exercise in losing weight and barriers to exercise
- Healthy/unhealthy diet and snack items
- High-fiber and low-fat dairy items kids would eat regularly
- Willingness to change traditional Latino diet to emphasize healthier foods and substitute for unhealthy foods
 - ◆ Including palatability assessment of samples of healthy traditional Latino menu items

Analysis

- Each focus group session audiotaped and transcribed
- Themes common to all 6 focus groups identified and recorded by 3 independent observers
- Final taxonomy created (by consensus) to summarize themes regarding
 - ◆ Healthy eating
 - ◆ Physical activity
 - ◆ Weight management strategies

Results: Characteristics of Participants (N=19) and Children*

Characteristic	Median or %
Median parental age, yrs (range)	35 (26-61)
Median child age, yrs (range)	9 (6-17)
Parent not high school graduate	21%
Annual family income \leq \$25,000	42%
Parent married and living with spouse	84%
>1 child in household	37%
Parent undocumented immigrant	26%
At risk for overweight children (BMI=85-94%)	40%
Overweight children (BMI >94%)	60%

*No significant differences among 4 Latino subgroups for any characteristic

Most Important Things Parents Can Do to Help Kids Lose Weight

- Eat more fruits and vegetables
- Include entire family in healthy eating
- Serve appropriate portions
- Restrict unhealthy snacks
- Cut back on soda
- More exercise
- Turn off TV and control amount of time playing video games
- Parental support and encouragement
- Parents setting example

Most Important Things Kids Can Do to Help Themselves Lose Weight

11

- Eat healthier
- Reduce portion size
- Nutritional education in schools
- Less TV and video games
- More exercise
- Exercise together with family
- Parental motivation and assistance

Most Important Things Kids Can Do to Help Themselves Lose Weight

12

Illustrative comment: importance of exercising together as family and parental motivation:

- “My problem is that I have diabetes and my son is fat, too. I try to go to the gym and exercise. He comes with me because he won’t do it alone, and if he does, he will just sit there. I exercise and he tries to do the same thing. I don’t want him to suffer from diabetes, too.”

Most Important Things Kids Can Do to Help Themselves Lose Weight

13

Illustrative comment: nutritional education in schools

- “Schools should also be taught what to serve. It’s pointless if we are enforcing this at home, and then they go to school where they are feeding them the same thing. ‘What did you eat today? Pizza.’ That’s what they give them at school. It makes no sense to change at home if they are giving them something else at school.”

Exercise Helpful in Kid's Weight Loss and Barriers to Exercise

14

- Parents agreed exercise important in kids' weight loss
- Numerous barriers cited to kids exercising
 - ◆ Expense
 - ◆ Lack of time
 - ◆ Not enough programs in community
 - ◆ Lack of family-oriented programs
 - ◆ Unsafe neighborhoods
 - ◆ Not convenient
 - ◆ Fear of teasing

Barriers to Exercise

Illustrative comments:

- “There are programs, but they are inaccessible and expensive.”
- “A lot of Latinos live in neighborhoods where they have to restrict certain activities for their kids because there are gangs or too many cars driving by.”
- “If this was Mexico, we would have to walk everywhere, to school, the store, everywhere. Not here—since they are long distances, you have to use the car.”
- “Most of his peers are skinny, so he feels like he’s the only fat one, and it’s starting to affect him.”

Healthy Diet and Snack Items

- Parents identified diet and snack items generally agreed upon by experts as healthy and helpful in kids' weight management
 - ◆ Fruits and vegetables
 - ◆ High-fiber foods
 - ◆ Baking instead of frying
 - ◆ Greater consumption of water
 - ◆ Low-fat dairy products
 - ◆ Reduced processed carbohydrates, like tortillas and bread
 - ◆ Smaller portions

Unhealthy Diet and Snack Items

- Parents also identified diet and snack items generally agreed upon by experts as unhealthy and not helpful in kids' weight management
 - ◆ Fried foods
 - ◆ Twinkies, donuts, and cookies
 - ◆ Ice cream and candy
 - ◆ Chips
 - ◆ Soda
 - ◆ Cooking with lard
 - ◆ Fast food

High-Fiber and Low-Fat Dairy Foods

- Parents identified many high-fiber and low-fat dairy foods that their children would consume
- High-fiber foods
 - ◆ Oatmeal
 - ◆ Cheerios
 - ◆ Beans
 - ◆ Brown rice
- Low-fat dairy
 - ◆ Yogurt
 - ◆ Low-fat cheese
 - ◆ Low-fat milk
 - ◆ But cottage cheese not viewed favorably by some

Willingness to Change Traditional Latino Diet

- Parents willing to change traditional Latino diet by emphasizing healthier foods and substituting for unhealthy foods
 - ◆ With guidance and education
 - ◆ Because overweight dangerous
 - ◆ By making tortillas without lard, using vegetable oil
 - ◆ By adding beans to rice
 - ◆ By having brown instead of white rice
 - ◆ By having less red meat and more fish

Willingness to Change Traditional Latino Diet

Illustrative comments:

- “We come to this state to change our life, and then we see ourselves trapped by our diet, which is high in fat, carbohydrates, and sugar. It’s hard for us to adapt and look for healthy food.”
- “We have to realize we can make our rice more nutritious with pigeon peas (*gandules*). We have to keep our traditional foods, but realize that we can make them more nutritious.”
- “I would do anything for my son and whole family to be healthier.”
- “We need something close to our diet that is healthy. We don’t want a change of culture.”

Positive Responses to Healthy Modification of Traditional Latino Food

Mexican menu items

- On 1-10 scale (10=best), mean parent rating of samples = 9.3 (with two 10s)

Puerto Rican menu items

- On 1-10 scale (10=best), mean parent rating of samples = 8.8
- “It tastes like traditional Puerto Rican rice and beans.”

Other Latino menu items

- On 1-10 scale (10=best), mean parent rating of samples = 9.3 (with two 10s)
- “It’s delicious.”

Conclusions

Latino parents reported following weight management strategies would help overweight/at risk for overweight Latino children:

- Reduced portion sizes
- Greater vegetable/fruit consumption
- Reduced intake of fried foods, soda, candy, and junk food
- More physical activity
- Decreased inactivity
- Parental motivation and assistance
- Exercising together as a family

Conclusions

- Latino parents report their children would accept
 - ◆ High-fiber foods, such as beans and whole grain cereals
 - ◆ Low-fat dairy, such as yogurt and cheese
- Latino parents very open to integrating healthy alternatives into traditional Latino meals and snacks
 - ◆ Such as whole-wheat enchiladas and brown rice
 - ◆ Families found samples of these alternatives very palatable

Implications

- Study findings suggest that successful weight management strategies for overweight/at risk for overweight Latino children may require both
 - ◆ Traditional approaches that integrate family preferences and involvement
 - ◆ Culturally sensitive innovations