

## Healthy Eating, Activity, and Reduction of Teen Stress (HEARTS) Study



### Quick Facts about Obesity and Academic Success:

Several research studies have shown that teens who are overweight or obese have poorer academic outcomes than their healthy weight peers. About 34% of US adolescents are overweight or obese, and these youth are less likely to graduate from high school and go to college compared to their healthy-weight peers. Rates of obesity in adults are the highest (35.6%) for those who without a high school degree. Teens who are overweight are at increased risk for a range of mental health concerns (e.g., bullying/teasing, anxiety, depression) that negatively impact academic success. We are hopeful that, by targeting both a healthy lifestyle and decreased stress, this intervention will be helpful to teens who are overweight and from a low-income background!

### About Project HEARTS:

With funding from the National Institutes of Health, we are conducting a study to test a 16-week healthy lifestyle and stress management program designed specifically for adolescents (13-17 years) who are overweight and from a low-income background. Key info:

- **What are we doing, and how do teens benefit?** Our 16-week group-based intervention teaches teens strategies to manage stress (e.g., relaxation, mindfulness skills) as well as helping teens to achieve a healthy lifestyle through a focus on healthy eating and physical activity. Our Youth Advisory Board has been quite enthusiastic about this intervention, especially the content geared toward stress management! Our treatment model is informed by previous research and feedback from teens within our demographic group, and the intervention is tailored specifically to fit the unique needs of teens from a low-income background.
- **What is our target population?** We are looking to get the word out about this study to teens (13-17 years old) who are overweight and from a low-income background. Within the school setting we would prefer to invite all teens within this age range to participate, rather than "single out" those who might be overweight. We often find that teens qualify within the "overweight" range even when we would not initially perceive them to be so. We will conduct a phone screen with interested families and then invite those who appear to qualify for an in-person study visit. We hope to have between 80-100 adolescents participate in this study. Since the study will be going on for the next 1-2 years, we are also screening youth who are 12 years old so that they can begin to participate when they turn 13.
- **Is there a cost to families?** This research study provides intervention free of charge. Families who qualify for participation can earn up to \$130. We provide transportation fare to the assessment visits.
- **Where does the study take place?** All study procedures (including the pre-post assessment and group sessions) will occur outside of school hours and at a location

(e.g., local community center or at Kent State) other than school. There are no required school resources. If a school is interested in having the program on-site, we would be happy to do that and schedule based on what works well for the school (e.g., schedule the groups during an "after school program" time).

- **Is there a benefit to the school/academic success?** In addition to promoting a healthy lifestyle, mindfulness has shown benefits in terms of learning! Mindfulness is associated with improved retention of knowledge and test performance. Further, mindfulness may help improve the ability to regulate emotions (e.g., test anxiety) which may increase student performance on high-stakes testing. I am very interested in building lasting research-based collaborations with area schools and districts. As a licensed clinical psychologist with a specialization in child-health/pediatric psychology, I would be delighted to "give back" to the school, for example by talking with school staff (e.g., consultation, seminar with school counselors, teacher tips), parents, or students about managing stress through the use of mindfulness. Please let me know if there are other ways that I can collaborate with or be helpful to school staff. There are several technology-related resources that can be used with adolescents.
- **How can I learn more?** Please contact Amy Sato, Ph.D., Director of Project HEARTS and Associate Professor of Psychology Sciences at Kent State University. Contact information: email - [asato2@kent.edu](mailto:asato2@kent.edu); office phone (330) 672-4888; lab phone (330) 672-2231