



JPNN|A new study has found a link between obesity in adolescent girls and lower academic levels throughout their teens. The researchers, from various universities in the UK, have published the results of their study in the International Journal of Obesity, and they say theirs is the first comprehensive study to look into the association between obesity and academics in teens. Though the association was less clear in boys, the team says for teenage girls, the link was clear. "Further work is needed to understand why obesity is negatively related to academic attainment, but it is clear that teenagers, parents and policymakers in education and public health should be aware of the lifelong educational and economic impact of obesity," said Professor John Reilly, principal investigator and professor at the University of Strathclyde in the UK. To conduct their study, the team assessed data from nearly 6,000 children who were part of the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC). This included information on weight status and academic attainment, as determined by national tests at the ages of 11, 13 and 16 years old. Overall, the results revealed that girls who were obese at age 11 had lower academic achievement at ages 11, 13 and 16 years, compared with those of a healthy weight. Additionally, in the core subjects of English, math and science, academic performance was lower by a grade equivalent to a D instead of a C, which the researchers say was the sample's average.

Even after taking into account factors that could distort their findings, such as socio-economic status, mental health, IQ and age of onset of the menstrual cycle, the researchers found they did not change the link between obesity and academic achievement. "There is a clear pattern which shows that girls who are in the obese range are performing more poorly than their counterparts in the healthy weight range throughout their teenage years," says Dr. Josie Booth, of the University of Dundee. The team notes that because mental health, IQ and age of onset of the menstrual cycle did not affect the link they found, "further work is required to understand the underlying mechanisms." Agency/PT