



Study: Early Diet Advice for Kids Sticks

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DALLAS - Teaching children from a young age to eat a low-fat diet can be effective — even as they reach their teens and begin eating more meals away from home, according to a new study.

The study of children in Finland found that those who were taught to focus on healthy fats — those found in fish, nuts, seeds and oils from plants — had slightly lower cholesterol levels compared to those who ate an unrestricted diet.

The researchers followed the 1,062 children from 7 months to 14 years of age. About half of the children and their families were counseled to shift fat intake from animal-based saturated fats to healthier unsaturated fats. The rest did not get specific diet advice.



Researchers also note that fears that a low intake of saturated fat might influence growth and brain development in young children are unfounded.

- At age of 14, no differences found between groups in height or weight
- An earlier study of the groups found no differences in brain development at age 5.

Dr. Sarah Blumenschein said the study shows that early

intervention is the key to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Children who ate healthy fats — like those found in fish, nuts, and plant oils, had lower cholesterol levels compared to children on unrestricted diets.

“The earlier you intervene, the more likely you are going to be successful,” she said.

While the group that got specific dietary counseling had lower cholesterol readings than the other group, the difference was statistically significant for boys but not for girls — a difference of about 5 percent in boys and 2-4 percent in girls depending on age.

But doctors say that even a small decrease in cholesterol levels can have a big influence. “If you study large numbers of people, the small increments result in a significant change in heart attacks and cardiac deaths,” said Dr. Art Labovitz, cardiology director at Saint Louis University School of Medicine.