

# **An Evaluation of the BALANCE Program: Nutrition Education and Skill Building for Healthy Behaviour Change**

*M Hotson<sup>1</sup>, L Visser<sup>1</sup>, A Haasdyk<sup>2</sup>*

*<sup>1</sup>Northern Ontario Dietetic Internship Program, Sudbury, ON, <sup>2</sup>NEO Kids - Health Sciences North, Sudbury, ON*

**Introduction:** The BALANCE program is a family-based pediatric obesity treatment that includes interventions based on health outcomes rather than changes in weight and body mass index.

**Objectives:** To determine if the BALANCE program's nutrition education and skill building components are effective in supporting parents in adopting healthy eating behaviours in their children, aged 5-17.

**Methods:** An adapted Public Health Ontario (PHO) Health ChAMPS (Health of Children and Measures of Parental Support) survey was used; the BALANCE version had 13 questions and legal guardians were asked to complete the pre- and post-survey online using Qualtrics©. Data collection occurred at intake in August 2019 and 18 weeks later at the final weekly session. Quantitative analysis involved comparing response averages pre and post-intervention and t-tests for statistical significance.

**Results:** Twelve of 24 participants consented to the study; five surveys were completed pre and seven completed post-intervention. Positive behaviour changes included: having fruits and vegetables at home; increased intake of vegetables/fruit; child involvement in food preparation; encouraging breakfast; decreased barriers to healthy eating (e.g. income, busy schedules and picky eating); enforcing rules about eating together; eating away from the TV; and, eating vegetables/fruit. Pre-program barriers related to knowledge, busy schedules and eating behaviours whereas post-program included difficulty implementing knowledge due to physical, financial, time and motivation issues. No statistical differences were seen due to small sample size, low response rate and different participants completing pre- and post-surveys.

**Conclusions:** Due to study limitations, the program's ability to elicit healthy behaviour changes could not be evaluated. Continued recruitment and evaluation with improved survey methods will inform program effectiveness.

**Significance:** Ongoing evaluation can inform development of obesity intervention programs and support curriculum development of the BALANCE program. The diversity of reported barriers to implementing behaviour change emphasizes the importance of treating pediatric obesity with a collaborative multi-disciplinary team.