



# Obesity can be beaten

**One in four Australian children is overweight and incidence locally could be greater. Fortunately, help is at hand, as Natalie Oliveri reports.**

OVERWEIGHT and obese teens will take part in a program run by The Children's Hospital at Westmead in July which aims to curb the growing number of adolescents with weight problems.

LOOZIT is a free, nine-week program that teaches adolescents how to live a healthy lifestyle and become active.

Janice O'Connor, a research dietitian at the hospital, said losing weight was not the focus of the study.

"It is not a calorie controlled program and they are not put on a diet," she said.

"It's about changing to healthy behaviours and setting realistic and simple weekly goals. For teenagers, there is really nothing out there to help them - they are not suitable for adult weight loss programs.

"Being overweight is very stigmatising - a lot of the children are teased at school.

"Improving self-esteem is a big part of the program."

At present, one in four NSW children is overweight or obese. A recent study conduc-

ted at the Children's Hospital at Westmead with 200 15-year-olds found that 31 per cent (62 children) were obese or overweight.

Mrs O'Connor said that early intervention is the key to stopping the "increasing" obesity epidemic.

Josh Hamm, 14, took part in LOOZIT last year. His mother, Sheila, said her son began to gain weight after an ankle injury prevented him from playing soccer.

**'Improving self-esteem is a big part of the program.'**

**- Janice O'Connor**  
Research dietitian

"It showed us how much sugar was in certain foods and how to increase activity time each day," Mrs Hamm said.

"It taught the whole family to take a look at how we were eating and it's made Josh so much more confident.

"Two years ago Josh would stress because he would always be put at the back of a team because he had trouble keeping up.

"He's much happier and makes an effort to do exercise - it's easier to get him to eat well."

LOOZIT starts in July at the Merrylands Community Health Centre.

Details: Janice O'Connor, 9845 1291 or visit [www.chw.edu.au/kids/loozit](http://www.chw.edu.au/kids/loozit).



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**Healthy living:** LOOZIT facilitator Vanessa Shrewsbury and research dietitian Janice O'Connor.  
**Picture:** Natalie Spiteri