



Weight loss plan for teens boosts sex appeal

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Health Reporter

OVERWEIGHT and obese teenagers felt sexier and more confident and their waistlines shrank after participating in a group program held at Sydney community health centres.

An evaluation of the "Loozit" program by obesity experts has found that it significantly increased self-esteem for participants, who were aged 13 to 16.

The report, published this month in the journal *Nutrition & Dietetics*, said all but two of the 22 adolescents completed the pilot program in 2005 - the other two were unable to make it to the last session.

"There were significant increases in the scores for physical appearance and romantic appeal by the end of the five-month program," the evaluation said.

Researchers have previously expressed concerns that weight loss programs may have a negative impact on self-esteem.

Parents reported their children were making healthier food choices and increasing physical activity.

There were also significant reductions in waist circumference and increases in the "healthy" HDL cholesterol levels.

Fat intake and exercise levels remained the same, though researchers believe this may be due

to flaws in measurement methods and skewed self-reporting.

The adolescents attended weekly group sessions for four weeks then another session at two, four and five months.

Goals included eating together as a family, having water as the main beverage, eating increased fruit and vegetables, increasing physical activity to an hour a day and reducing time spent watching TV or using a computer.

They participated in group discussions, games and cooking lessons.

It was the first weight management program to involve adolescents in evaluating the program and their feedback - such as weekly sessions, sessions for parents and booster sessions for up to two years - have all since been incorporated.

Louise Baur, an obesity expert from the University of Sydney's discipline of pediatrics and child health, said the program could be run by any health professional with an understanding of youths and families. "It doesn't have to be a super-duper weight loss dietitian," Professor Baur said.

This made it cheaper than studies requiring one-on-one therapy and several physical activity sessions a week, and thus is much more sustainable.

One in four adolescents are overweight or obese, Professor Baur said.

Josh Hamm, 15, of Londonderry, has just finished the program after two years.

He said he felt fitter and happier and is doing his Duke of Edinburgh Award, which included a recent three-day hike in the Blue Mountains.

"The great thing about the program is that it's a round table with a bunch of teenagers with one person [health professional] so we just sat there and talked ... It didn't feel like a weight loss program."



Feeling a lot better ... Josh Hamm. Photo: Jon Reid