Today’s piece was prepared by Rebecca Wu, MD, based on a Los Angeles Times article [Study strengthens link between childhood obesity and brain differences](https://www.latimes.com/science/story/2019-12-10/study-of-kids-strengthens-link-between-obesity-and-brain-differences)

The article discusses a [JAMA Pediatrics cross-sectional study](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2756132) of 9- and 10-year-old children with varying BMIs and found that higher BMI was associated with a statistically significant lower prefrontal cortex thickness on MRI, and reduced performance on some executive functioning tasks.

The article initially appropriately summarizes that the findings of the study could not comment on whether there was any causal relationship between the association, and correctly points out that it is unknown if the differences found were clinically or educationally relevant. However, it then goes on to exaggerate the applicability of the research findings by pondering whether obesity could be prevented by targeting brain function.

The article also describes research in adults regarding the association between obesity and inflammation and proposes that inflammation beginning in childhood could be causing both increased weight and reduced brain structure. However, the causal effect of inflammation and other confounding variables cannot be commented on by virtue of the [cross-sectional design](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2756127) of the study. Overall the article tries to reflect the scientific uncertainty in this area, however it fails to fully convey the limitations of the study design and could contribute to harmful stereotypes and stigma around weight.

**RESOURCE REGARDING OBESITY FOR FAMILIES:**

[Seattle Children's Obesity Program](https://www.seattlechildrens.org/about/community-benefit/obesity-program/) *Wellness programs for children and adolescents*

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!