Childhood obesity has become a global public health crisis, with 43 million children worldwide being overweight or obese. Physical inactivity and unhealthy eating behaviors have resulted in both excessive energy intake and insufficient energy expenditure in children. Childhood is a critical time for learning about and beginning to develop a healthy lifestyle. Intervening during childhood holds promise for curtailing the current obesity epidemic plaguing this young population.

Dr. Ling’s area of research focuses on prevention of overweight/obesity in preschool and elementary school children through theory-driven, multi-component physical activity and nutrition interventions. Her recent pilot work indicates that the traditional single-component intervention targeting only children in the area of either physical activity or nutrition is inadequate for preventing excessive weight gain in children. As a result, she has directed her efforts toward involving parents and teachers in the interventions.

Specifically, she is interested in identifying optimal strategies for involving parents and teachers in an overweight/obesity prevention program for children. To achieve her objective, she has completed an extensive review of literature, conducted focus groups with parents, and collected information via online surveys with teachers. She has published her research in several peer-reviewed journals, both within and outside nursing, and presented at both national and international levels.

Currently, she is examining parents’ and teachers’ healthy behaviors and health-related concerns in order to tailor an intervention to meet their identified needs. Dr. Ling proposes that by targeting parents and teachers to promote their health, health information and behaviors will translate to children to prevent their excessive weight gain.

Having a master’s degree in biostatistics, Dr. Ling is also interested in scale development and evaluation, as well as the application of statistics in behavioral research. Currently, she is applying hierarchical linear regression, structural equation modeling, generalized estimating equations, and linear mixed-effects models to evaluate human behavioral studies.