Influence of common variants near INSIG2, in FTO, and near MC4R genes on overweight and the metabolic profile in adolescence: the TRAILS (TRacking Adolescents’ Individual Lives Survey) Study1–3

Eryn T Liem, Judith M Vonk, Pieter JJ Sauer, Gerrit van der Steege, Elvira Oosterom, Ronald P Stolk, and Harold Snieder

ABSTRACT
Background: Overweight is a complex trait in which both environmental and genetic factors play a role.
Objective: We aimed to evaluate the influence of common genetic variants identified by genome-wide association studies on overweight and the metabolic profile in adolescence.
Design: In a population-based cohort of 663 girls and 612 boys aged 16 y, weight, height, skinfold thicknesses, percentage body fat, waist circumference, blood pressure, glucose, insulin, lipid profile, and DNA were obtained. We defined overweight according to international criteria. We performed multiple linear and logistic regression analyses to assess the influence of candidate single nucleotide polymorphisms near the INSIG2, in the FTO, and near the MC4R genes and repeated-measures analyses of available body mass index (BMI) and skinfold thickness data across 3 visits at ages 11, 13.5, and 16 y.
Results: A total of 15.1% of participants were overweight or obese at age 16 y. No associations with INSIG2 were found. Common variation in the FTO gene was associated with sex-specific z scores of BMI (B: 0.11; 95% CI: 0.03, 0.19), sum of skinfold thicknesses (B: 0.12; 95% CI: 0.04, 0.20), percentage body fat (B: 0.11; 95% CI: 0.03, 0.19), waist circumference (B: 0.11; 95% CI: 0.03, 0.19), fasting glucose (B: 0.10; 95% CI: 0.00, 0.20), and overweight (odds ratio: 1.34; 95% CI: 1.06, 1.69) at age 16 y. Repeated-measures analyses confirmed the associations for BMI and skinfold thickness data across 3 visits at ages 11, 13.5, and 16 y.
Conclusions: Common variation in the FTO gene is associated with overweight and abdominal adiposity. Variation near the MC4R gene is associated with BMI. These findings in adolescents strengthen and extend the results from previous research.


INTRODUCTION
Overweight is associated with an increased risk of diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia, and cardiovascular disease. It is known that childhood overweight tends to track into adolescence and adulthood (1, 2). Moreover, epidemiologic studies have shown that, already in childhood, total and abdominal fat appear to be significantly associated with an unfavorable metabolic profile, including insulin resistance, elevated LDL cholesterol, and decreased HDL cholesterol (3, 4). Thus, childhood overweight poses a major public health concern.

Lifestyle factors such as increased energy intake and decreased physical activity are probably the main determinants of the increased prevalence of childhood overweight. Genetic background predicts an individual’s susceptibility to weight change resulting from a certain lifestyle (5, 6). Multiple genes are involved, probably interacting with each other and with environmental factors, implicating a multifactorial trait. Recently, genome-wide association studies in large cohorts have identified common variants associated with overweight. The variant near INSIG2 was the first to be associated with BMI in a genome-wide association study (7). Although it was shown that variation near INSIG2 predicted the amount of weight loss during treatment of obese children and adolescents (8), the association between the variant near INSIG2 and overweight was not confirmed by other studies.

1 From the Departments of Pediatrics–Beatrix Children’s Hospital (ETL and PJJS), Epidemiology (ETL, JMV, RPS, and HS), and Genetics (GVdS and E0), University Medical Center Groningen, University of Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands.
2 This study was performed within the Groningen Expert Center for Kids with Obesity, supported by Hutchison Whampoa Ltd and by the University Medical Center Groningen. This research is part of the TRacking Adolescents’ Individual Lives Survey (TRAILS). Participating centers of TRAILS include various departments of the University Medical Center and University of Groningen, the Erasmus University Medical Center Rotterdam, the University of Utrecht, the Radboud Medical Center Nijmegen, and the Trimbos Institute, all in the Netherlands. Principal investigators: J Ormel (University Medical Center Groningen) and FC Verhulst (Erasmus University Medical Center). TRAILS has been financially supported by various grants from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research NWO (Medical Research Council program grant GB-MW 940-38-011; ZonMW Brainpower grant 100-001-004; ZonMw Risk Behavior, and Dependence grants 60-60600-98-018 and 60-60600-97-118; ZonMw Culture and Health grant 261-98-710; Social Sciences Council medium-sized investment grants GB-MaGW 480-01-006 and GB-MaGW 480-07-001; Social Sciences Council project grants GB-MaGW 457-03-018, GB-MaGW 452-04-314, and GB-MaGW 452-06-004; and NWO large-sized investment grant 175.010.2003.005); the Sophia Foundation for Medical Research (projects 301 and 393), the Dutch Ministry of Justice (WODC), and the participating universities.
3 Address correspondence to ET Liem, Groningen Expert Center for Kids with Obesity, Department of Pediatrics, University Medical Center Groningen, PO Box 30.001, 9700 RB Groningen, Netherlands. E-mail: et.liem@bkk.umcg.nl.
Received June 6, 2009. Accepted for publication November 16, 2009.
First published online December 9, 2009; doi: 10.3945/ajcn.2009.28186.

studies (9–13). An association between common variation in the FTO gene and BMI was identified by 3 groups (14–16), 2 of which used genome-wide association studies (15, 16). This was confirmed in multiple follow-up studies (17–25). Recently, common variants near the MC4R gene have been found to influence BMI in whites (26) and waist circumference and insulin resistance in Indian Asians (27).

In most of these studies, an association with childhood overweight was also found, not only for FTO (14, 15, 19, 24, 25) but also for variants near the INSIG2 (7) and MC4R (26) genes. In 2 pediatric studies (15, 24), overweight was assessed on the basis of BMI and a dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry scan, more specifically measuring overall adipose tissue. However, few studies have evaluated abdominal fat (28) or overweight-related metabolic profiles (29) in children. These are important because they confer an increased risk of later metabolic complications such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Because results obtained by Wählén et al (30) suggest that FTO could be involved in body weight regulation through lipolysis, it would also be interesting, from a pathophysiologic point of view, to evaluate whether these genetic variants are associated with metabolic traits, such as lipids, and, if so, whether these associations are driven by BMI, as was found in studies of adults (31).

The aim of this study was to assess the influence of common genetic variants found through genome-wide association studies, more specifically variants near the INSIG2, in the FTO, and near the MC4R genes, on overweight and its related metabolic traits at age 16 y. We assessed overweight by BMI, total body fat by sum of skinfold thicknesses and total body impedance analysis, abdominal adiposity by waist circumference, and metabolic profile by blood pressure, glucose, and lipids. In addition, BMI (at ages 11 and 13.5 y) and sum of skinfold thicknesses (at age 11 y) were available from earlier visits. Finally, we aimed to evaluate possible modification of genetic effects by physical activity.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

Study population

Our study was performed in the TRAILS (TRacking Adolescents’ Individual Lives Survey) population, an ongoing Dutch prospective cohort study assessing both psychosocial and physical health from preadolescence into adulthood. Sample selection was described elsewhere (32). In brief, children were recruited through community registers and through their schools to obtain a representative sample. The present study included mainly data from the third assessment visit, during which most overweight-related data were collected. This visit took place in 2003–2004 at age 13.5 ± 0.5 y and in 2005–2007 at a mean (±SD) age of 16.2 ± 0.67 y. In addition, during 2 previous visits (in 2001–2002 at age 11.1 ± 0.55 y and in 2003–2004 at age 13.5 ± 0.52 y), weight and height (first and second visits) and skinfold thicknesses (first visit only) were measured, which we included in our repeated-measures analyses. For this study we included participants for whom DNA was available (n = 1460). We excluded all participants who were not of northern European ancestry (n = 161) and the second of all siblings within the cohort (n = 25), which resulted in a population of 1275 adolescents (52.0% girls). All procedures were approved by the Dutch Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects. Written informed consent, including specific consent to undertake genetic analyses, was obtained from participants and their parents or custodians.

Measures

We measured weight and height using regularly calibrated equipment (models 770 and 214, respectively; Seca, Hamburg, Germany). Body mass index (BMI; in kg/m²) was also calculated. We defined overweight and obesity according to international age- and sex-adjusted BMI criteria (equivalent to the Dutch 94th and 99.7th percentiles in 1980 for overweight and obesity, respectively) (33). We obtained triceps, biceps, subscapular, and suprailiac skinfold thicknesses with a Harpenden skinfold caliper (CMS Instruments, London, United Kingdom); and the sum of 4 thicknesses was calculated. We measured waist circumference at the midpoint between the lower costal margin and the iliac crest. We performed all measurements in duplicate, and, if the difference between these measurements exceeded a predefined value, a third measurement was performed. All available measurements were used to calculate means. We performed a hand-to-foot bioelectrical impedance analysis (type BIA 101; Akern, Pontassieve, Italy), from which percentage body fat (%BF) was calculated by using the Deurenberg equation (34). Systolic (SBP) and diastolic (DBP) blood pressure were measured in duplicate with a Dinamap Critikon 1846SX (Critikon Inc, Tampa, FL), from which we calculated means.

We obtained a blood sample after ≥8 h of fasting for the measurement of glucose (Roche Diagnostics, Basel, Switzerland), insulin (Diagnostic Systems Laboratories Inc, Webster, TX), triglycerides, total cholesterol, and HDL cholesterol (Roche Diagnostics). LDL cholesterol was calculated according to Friedewald’s equation (35). The presence of the metabolic syndrome was determined according to the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) criteria (36, 37), based on age-specific cutoffs for waist circumference, triglycerides, HDL cholesterol, blood pressure, and glucose.

Questionnaires were filled out to assess pubertal stage (Physical Development Scale questionnaire; 38) and physical activity. We asked how many days per week the adolescents participated in ≥60 min of moderate or vigorous physical activity, from which “sufficient physical activity” was determined as ≥5 d/wk, in accordance with international recommendations (39).

Genotyping

We extracted DNA from buffy coats (n = 1216) or buccal swabs (Cytobrush) (n = 59) using a manual salting out procedure similar to the protocol described by Miller et al (40). Genotyping was performed on the Illumina BeadStation 500 platform (Illumina Inc, San Diego, CA) by laboratory personnel blinded to the true identity of the individual samples. Scan data were analyzed and genotyped in BeadStudio 3.0 (Illumina Inc, San Diego, CA). For this study, we used genotype data from rs7566605 (INSIG2), rs9939609 (FTO), rs17782313 (MC4R), and rs17700633 (MC4R). Call rates were 100% for all but rs17782313, which could be genotyped in 99.9% of the participants. Genotyping accuracy for our single nucleotide
TABLE 1
Genotype and minor allele frequencies
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gene</th>
<th>Genotype frequency</th>
<th>HWE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rs</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSIG2</td>
<td>1275</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTO</td>
<td>1275</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC4R</td>
<td>1274</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC4R</td>
<td>1275</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( ^1 \) = major allele, 2 = minor allele. MAF, minor allele frequency; HWE, Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium (determined by Pearson’s chi-square test).

polymorphisms (SNPs), as determined by concordance between duplicates, was 100%. Genotype frequencies of all SNPs were in Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium (Table 1).

Data analysis

Weight, BMI, thicknesses, waist circumference, SBP, and triglycerides were log transformed to obtain a better approximation of the normal distribution, before calculating age- and sex-specific z scores with the use of means and SDs.

We performed multiple linear regression analyses for weight, height, BMI, skinfold thicknesses, and %BF z scores and all components of the metabolic syndrome, ie, waist circumference, SBP, DBP, glucose, HDL cholesterol, and triglycerides z scores. On the basis of previous reports (7, 15, 26), INSIG2 genotypes were analyzed under a recessive model; FTO and MC4R genotypes under an additive model. We adjusted all models for age and pubertal stage. To evaluate the influence on overweight (including obesity) and the metabolic syndrome, we performed multiple logistic regression analyses. In all regression analyses, we evaluated the interaction of genotypes with sex and physical activity by adding a multiplicative term to the models. We also evaluated the interaction between genotypes.

RESULTS

Our population consisted of 663 girls and 612 boys, with a mean (±SD) age of 16.2 ± 0.67 y. At this age, 12.4% were overweight and 2.7% were obese (Table 2). Compared with girls, boys showed less advanced pubertal stage, were more physically active, were heavier and taller, and had a lower BMI, sum of skinfold thicknesses, and %BF (Table 2). The prevalence of the metabolic syndrome was 4.5%. Significant sex differences were found for all metabolic characteristics (Table 3). To evaluate selection bias, we compared the 1275 participants included in this study with the original sample of 1868 children who participated in the BMI measurements at age 11 y. Compared with the 593 who were either excluded (n = 25) or lost to
follow-up \((n = 568)\) between the first and third assessment visits, there were no statistically significant differences in BMI \(z\) score \((P = 0.19)\) and sum of thicknesses \(z\) score \((P = 0.07)\).

Because the analyses of sum of skinfold thicknesses provided results similar to those from the analyses of all 4 thicknesses separately, only analyses regarding the former were reported. For none of the models, the interaction with sex was significant. Therefore, we did not report these results.

**INSIG2**

We found no associations between the SNP near INSIG2 and measures of overweight or metabolic traits, neither in the cross-sectional analyses (Table 4) nor in the repeated-measures analyses (Table 5).

### Table 3

Metabolic characteristics according to sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>P for sex effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systolic blood pressure (mm Hg)</td>
<td>117 (109–127)(^2)</td>
<td>1252</td>
<td>113 (107–122)</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>122 (113–132)</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diastolic blood pressure (mm Hg)</td>
<td>61 ± 7(^3)</td>
<td>1252</td>
<td>62 ± 7</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>61 ± 7</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glucose (mmol/L)</td>
<td>4.5 ± 0.4</td>
<td>955</td>
<td>4.5 ± 0.4</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>4.6 ± 0.4</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insulin (mU/L)</td>
<td>12.0 (9.1–15.3)</td>
<td>948</td>
<td>12.1 (9.5–16.0)</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>11.0 (8.5–15.0)</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total cholesterol (mmol/L)</td>
<td>3.8 ± 0.7</td>
<td>956</td>
<td>4.0 ± 0.7</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>3.6 ± 0.7</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDL cholesterol (mmol/L)</td>
<td>1.5 ± 0.3</td>
<td>956</td>
<td>1.5 ± 0.3</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>1.4 ± 0.3</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDL cholesterol (mmol/L)</td>
<td>2.2 ± 0.6</td>
<td>956</td>
<td>2.4 ± 0.6</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>2.2 ± 0.6</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triglycerides (mmol/L)</td>
<td>0.69 (0.52–0.92)</td>
<td>956</td>
<td>0.72 (0.56–0.96)</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>0.63 (0.49–0.88)</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metabolic syndrome (%)(^4)</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) \(P\) values were obtained by using a chi-square test for the metabolic syndrome; \(t\) test for diastolic blood pressure, glucose, total cholesterol, and HDL and LDL cholesterol; and a Mann-Whitney \(U\) test for systolic blood pressure, insulin, and triglycerides.

\(^2\) Mean ± SD; interquartile range in parentheses (all such values).

\(^3\) Defined according to the International Diabetes Federation criteria on the basis of age-specific cutoffs for waist circumference, triglycerides, HDL cholesterol, blood pressure, and glucose.

### Table 4

Associations between genotypes and overweight-related measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSIG2</th>
<th>FTO</th>
<th>MC4R</th>
<th>MC4R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rs7566605: CC</td>
<td>rs9939609: per A allele</td>
<td>rs17782313: per C allele</td>
<td>rs17700633: per A allele</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overweight(^5)</td>
<td>1160</td>
<td>1.34 (1.06, 1.69)(^2)</td>
<td>1.20 (0.93, 1.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metabolic syndrome(^5)</td>
<td>886</td>
<td>2.05 (1.27, 3.31)(^2)</td>
<td>1.43 (0.86, 2.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight (z) score(^5)</td>
<td>1173</td>
<td>0.11 (0.03, 0.19)(^2)</td>
<td>0.05 (–0.04, 0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height (z) score(^4)</td>
<td>1176</td>
<td>0.02 (–0.06, 0.11)</td>
<td>–0.08 (–0.17, 0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI (z) score(^5)</td>
<td>1173</td>
<td>0.11 (0.03, 0.19)(^2)</td>
<td>0.11 (0.02, 0.20)(^2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skinfold thickness (z) score(^4)</td>
<td>1166</td>
<td>0.12 (0.04, 0.20)(^2)</td>
<td>0.05 (–0.04, 0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Body fat (z) score(^4)</td>
<td>1154</td>
<td>0.11 (0.03, 0.19)(^2)</td>
<td>0.04 (–0.05, 0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waist circumference (z) score(^4)</td>
<td>1172</td>
<td>0.11 (0.03, 0.19)(^2)</td>
<td>0.07 (–0.02, 0.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systolic blood pressure (z) score(^5)</td>
<td>1178</td>
<td>0.07 (–0.02, 0.15)</td>
<td>0.08 (0.01, 0.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diastolic blood pressure (z) score(^5)</td>
<td>1178</td>
<td>0.02 (–0.07, 0.10)</td>
<td>0.04 (0.06, 0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glucose (z) score(^4)</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>0.02 (–0.08, 0.11)</td>
<td>–0.04 (0.14, 0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDL-cholesterol (z) score(^4)</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>0.01 (–0.02, 0.20)</td>
<td>–0.04 (0.14, 0.07)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Odds ratios (95% CIs) are reported from multiple logistic regression analyses adjusted for pubertal stage.

\(^2\) \(P < 0.05\).

\(^3\) Odds ratios (95% CIs) are reported from multiple linear regression analyses adjusted for age, sex, and pubertal stage.

\(^4\) \(B\) values (95% CIs) are reported from multiple linear regression analyses adjusted for age and pubertal stage.

\(^5\) Log-transformed before calculation of \(z\) scores to obtain a better approximation of the normal distribution.

**FTO**

Linear regression analyses under an additive model, adjusted for sex and pubertal stage, showed that rs9939609 was significantly associated with weight \((B: 0.11; P = 0.01)\), BMI \((B: 0.11; P = 0.01)\), sum of skinfold thicknesses \((B: 0.12; P = 0.004)\), % BF \((B: 0.11; P = 0.01)\), waist circumference \((B: 0.11; P = 0.01)\), and fasting glucose \((B: 0.10; P = 0.04)\) (Table 4). FTO explained 0.5–0.7% of the variance in these outcome measures. Adjustment for BMI or %BF in the model for waist circumference resulted in nonsignificant results for FTO genotype. Adjustment for BMI, %BF, or waist circumference in the association between FTO and glucose did not change the results (all \(B\) values \(= 0.10; P = 0.048, 0.044, \) and \(0.042, \) respectively). No significant modification by physical activity was found in the associations
between FTO genotype and overweight measures or glucose (see supplementary Table 3, A–E, under “Supplemental data” in the online issue).

Logistic regression analyses showed that FTO was significantly associated with overweight and the metabolic syndrome after adjustment for sex and pubertal stage (Table 4). Per A allele, the OR of being overweight at age 16 y was 1.34 ($P = 0.01$), and the OR of developing the metabolic syndrome at age 16 y was 2.05 ($P = 0.003$). Adjustment for BMI in the metabolic syndrome model resulted in a nonsignificant OR of 1.66 ($P = 0.09$).

Repeated-measures analyses for BMI and sum of skinfold thicknesses, also under an additive model, showed the same pattern of results (Table 5). There were no significant interactions between FTO and age, which indicated that the associations of FTO with BMI and sum of skinfold thicknesses remained similar from 11 to 16 y of age (Figure 1A). As is clear from the figure, a recessive model for FTO gives the best description of our data (B: 0.21; $P = 0.01$). However, in line with the original articles and to limit the number of tests, we only presented results from the additive models. We found no significant interaction effect with physical activity, neither in the model for BMI (B = −0.06; 95% CI: −0.24, 0.11; $P = 0.47$) nor in the model for sum of skinfold thicknesses (B: 0.01; 95% CI: −0.16, 0.19; $P = 0.88$) (see supplementary Table 4, A and B, under “Supplemental data” in the online issue).

**MC4R**

Cross-sectional regression analyses adjusted for sex and pubertal stage showed that under an additive model, rs17782313 was significantly associated with BMI per minor allele increase in z score (OR: 0.11; $P = 0.02$), but not with overweight (OR: 1.20; $P = 0.17$). The variance explained by rs17782313 was 0.5%. In addition, rs17700633 was associated with HDL cholesterol (B: −0.11, $P = 0.04$), and there was a trend for BMI (B: 0.09, $P = 0.05$). Adjustment for BMI in the model for HDL cholesterol resulted in nonsignificant results. No association was found between the SNPs near MC4R and height. We evaluated possible modification by physical activity in the associations with BMI and HDL cholesterol, but we found no significant interactions ($P$ values ranging from 0.09 to 0.55). (See supplementary Table 3, A and F, under “Supplemental data” in the online issue.)

Repeated-measures analyses for BMI, also under an additive model, showed similar effect sizes compared with the cross-sectional analyses for rs17782313 (B: 0.12, $P = 0.01$) and rs17700633 (B: 0.08, $P = 0.047$) (Table 5). In the model containing both SNPs, only rs17782313 remained significantly associated with BMI z score (rs17782313, B: 0.10, $P = 0.03$; and rs17700633, B: 0.04, $P = 0.33$). There were no interactions between MC4R genotypes and time, which suggested a stable association between age 11 y and age 16 y (Figure 1B). We found no interactions with physical activity and no significant associations between variation near MC4R and sum of skinfold thicknesses, similar to the cross-sectional analyses.

When we included the FTO SNP (rs9939609) and rs17782313 in the same linear regression model for BMI at age 16 y, we

TABLE 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome variables</th>
<th>INSL2</th>
<th>FTO</th>
<th>MC4R</th>
<th>MC4R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weight z score</td>
<td>1273</td>
<td>0.02 (−0.14, 0.19)</td>
<td>0.06 (−0.01, 0.13)</td>
<td>0.05 (−0.03, 0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height z score</td>
<td>1274</td>
<td>−0.10 (−0.28, 0.07)</td>
<td>0.01 (−0.07, 0.08)</td>
<td>−0.08 (−0.16, 0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI z score</td>
<td>1273</td>
<td>0.07 (−0.11, 0.24)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.01, 0.16)</td>
<td>0.12 (0.03, 0.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skinfold thickness z score</td>
<td>1258</td>
<td>0.03 (−0.15, 0.20)</td>
<td>0.10 (0.02, 0.18)</td>
<td>0.06 (−0.03, 0.15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 All values are B values (95% CIs) that were reported from linear mixed models including age.
2 Outcome variables were log-transformed before calculating z scores to obtain a better approximation of the normal distribution.
3 $P < 0.05$.

**FIGURE 1.** Association between FTO single nucleotide polymorphism rs9939609 and BMI (A) and between MC4R single nucleotide polymorphism rs17782313 and BMI (B) from ages 11 to 16 y.
found no evidence for interaction ($P = 0.88$). In the model containing both SNPs, rs9939609 (B: 0.11; $P = 0.01$) and rs17782313 (B: 0.11; $P = 0.02$) were independently associated with BMI (Figure 2). Similar findings were obtained from the repeated-measures analyses ($B$ values of 0.08 and 0.12 and $P$ values of 0.03 and 0.01, respectively).

**DISCUSSION**

We studied the association of common variation in 3 genes discovered through genome-wide association studies with overweight and its associated metabolic traits in adolescence. In line with other large studies (9–11, 13, 42), we found no associations with the SNP near INSIG2, which supports the hypothesis that an important role for INSIG2 in the etiology of childhood overweight is unlikely. In contrast, we were able to replicate associations for FTO and the variants near MC4R.

**FTO**

The A allele of SNP rs9939609 was associated with higher BMI, sum of skinfold thicknesses, %BF, waist circumference, and fasting glucose. For BMI and sum of skinfold thicknesses we were able to establish that these associations were already present at age 11 y and persisted throughout adolescence to age 16 y. In addition, for each A allele in the FTO SNP, the risk of adolescent overweight increased by 1.34, and the risk of the metabolic syndrome increased by 2.05. Adjustment for BMI in the metabolic syndrome model rendered the association nonsignificant, which suggests that the effect of FTO variation on the metabolic syndrome was mediated by BMI. Our findings are in line with previous research in adolescents in which each A allele was found to be associated with an increase in BMI $z$ score of 0.05–0.12 and with an OR of 1.27 of being overweight (15). Furthermore, similar variances in BMI have been reported (14, 15, 21). In addition, we found no associations with lipid measurements, which agreed with the findings of a previous study in morbidly obese adults (17). However, Freathy et al (31) found statistically significant associations of FTO with glucose, insulin, triglycerides, and HDL.

These associations were all driven by BMI. Furthermore, the minor allele frequency (MAF) in our study (0.38) was slightly lower than that reported in HapMap (0.45 in Europeans), but lower frequencies were found in other studies (19, 21). Finally, in line with one of the original articles on FTO (15), we found no interaction with sex in the association with BMI.

Our results from both the cross-sectional and repeated-measures analyses suggest that physical activity does not modify the association between FTO variation and overweight. This finding is in contrast with that of other studies in a middle-aged Danish population ($n = 5554$) (12), in Amish adults (43), and more recently in a large UK population ($n = 20,374$) (44). This discrepancy may partly be explained by our smaller population, which resulted in a lower power to detect significant effects (see supplementary Table 2 under “Supplemental data” in the online issue). In addition, we measured physical activity differently. Because no gold standard exists for measuring physical activity by questionnaire, we used a measure based on international recommendations to divide the participants into clear subgroups of those with insufficient (70.2%) and those with sufficient (29.8%) exercise. However, the subgroup that does not sufficiently exercise is rather large, which could have influenced our findings. Cauchi et al (45) found an interaction between FTO and physical activity in their adolescent Finnish population ($n = 4780$), but not in their middle-aged French population ($n = 3167$). In line with our study, Jonsson et al (46) found no interaction between rs9939609 and physical activity on BMI in a large study among 15,925 Swedish and 2511 Finnish adults. This is also supported by a study in twins, in which the FTO $\times$ environment interaction was studied in general (47).

The function of the FTO gene remains unknown. Whereas some studies suggest that it plays a role in central regulation of body weight (14, 48), Wahlén et al (30) studied FTO with regard to fat cell function and adipose tissue gene expression. Their results suggest that FTO could be involved in body weight regulation through lipolysis. However, our results and those of others (17), in which no association was found with triglycerides or cholesterol, do not support this hypothesis (31).

**MC4R**

Variation near MC4R was associated with BMI $z$ score. The per minor allele increase of 0.11 in BMI $z$ score we found for rs17782313 was similar to the value of 0.10–0.13 described by Loos et al (26) in children aged 7–11 y. Also, similar to their findings, the effects were stronger for rs17782313 than for rs17700633, ie, the effect was driven by rs17782313. Additionally, the associations between the SNPs near MC4R and BMI were stable between ages 11 and 16 y. The MAFs we found for the SNPs near MC4R were in line with the frequencies previously reported (26). Although no direct evidence exists for a functional role of these variants (or the variants they tag) in MC4R expression, it has been described that the phenotypic pattern (positive association with height, which we were not able to replicate) is similar to the phenotype caused by rare MC4R mutations (26). In addition, the larger effect sizes found in children than in adults (26) suggest an association with early-onset obesity, similar to the effect of rare MC4R mutations.

The rs17782313 in MC4R was significantly associated with only BMI, and — although the association is in the same direction
— was not significantly associated with other measures of body fat, unlike FTO. This finding was probably due to the (near-significant) negative association between rs17782313 and height, which is larger than its positive effect on weight. Thus, the minor allele of rs17782313 is associated with a higher BMI through its combined effect on lower height and higher weight, which suggests that MC4R influences BMI in a different manner than FTO.

Including the FTO SNP and rs17782313 in the same model showed that they were independently associated with BMI, which suggests that their effects are additive. This has also been shown by Loos et al (26).

The main strength of our study was that we genotyped a homogeneous population of reasonable size in which multiple phenotypic measurements of overall and abdominal adiposity as well as associated metabolic traits were obtained. Power calculations using previously reported effect sizes for BMI z scores showed that, with an α of 0.05, our sample size (n = 1275) had a power of 28% to detect a cross-sectional association for rs7566605, 84% for rs9939609, 81% for rs17782313, and 15% for rs17700633 (see supplementary Table 1 under “Supplemental data” in the online issue). To our knowledge, this was the first population-based study to evaluate the influence of both FTO and variation near MC4R, not only on overall adiposity but also on abdominal adiposity and its related metabolic traits. In addition, we were able to evaluate associations with BMI and sum of skinfold thicknesses at both age 11 y and 16 y in repeated-measures analyses, which strengthens our findings for all outcome measures at age 16 y.

A potential limitation of our study was the dropout rate in TRAILS (31.7%), which was mainly due to a refusal to participate. Evaluation of selection bias did not show statistically significant differences between the participants and the group lost to follow-up, but a difference in sum of skinfold thicknesses cannot be excluded entirely. The fact that we found lower MAFs than reported in HapMap could suggest that a leaner population participated in the follow-up visit. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that this would affect the associations between genetic variants and the outcome variables of interest. In addition, the fact that our associations of BMI and sum of skinfold thicknesses were consistent across assessment visits renders it unlikely that a selection bias affected our findings. Another point of discussion is that this would affect the associations between genetic variants and the outcome of interest. In conclusion, in our population of 16-y-old adolescents, we found that variation near the MC4R gene was positively associated with BMI. In addition, variation in the FTO gene was not only positively associated with measures of overall fat but also with measures of abdominal fat. The associations were stable between ages 11 and 16 y. Our findings strengthen and extend the results from previous genome-wide association studies.

We thank Mathieu Platteeu and Ron de Booij for their valuable contribution. This research was part of TRAILS (Tracking Adolescents’ Individual Lives Survey). We are grateful to all the adolescents, their parents, and teachers who participated in this research and to everyone who worked on this project and made it possible.

The authors’ responsibilities were as follows—ETL: participated in the research design, data collection, data analysis, and drafting and writing of the manuscript; JMV: participated in the data analysis and writing of the manuscript; PIJS and RPS: participated in the research design and writing of the manuscript; GvdS: participated in the data collection and data analysis; EO: participated in the data collection; and HS: participated in the research design, data analysis, and writing of the manuscript. All of the authors participated in a critical review and in the final approval of the manuscript. None of the authors had any financial or personal conflicts of interest to declare.

REFERENCES


47. Cornes BK, Lind PA, Medland SE, Montgomery GW, Nyholt DR, Martin NG. Replication of the association of common rs9939609 variant of FTO with increased BMI in an Australian adult twin population but no evidence for gene by environment (G x E) interaction. Int J Obes (Lond) 2009;33:75–9.
