

Parents failing to recognize their children's risk for obesity may be contributing to epidemic

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With 17 percent of US children between ages 2 and 19 classified as obese, new research shows that parents may not be recognizing their own children's risk factors. A new study in the Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners shows that parents are likely to misperceive their child's weight - especially those parents who are overweight themselves.

Since [parents](#) are the most influential factor in laying the foundation for early childhood [weight](#) problems, researchers set out to assess the disconnect that exists between a parents' perception of their child's weight and the obvious [physical appearance](#) of their child. Looking at several studies which examine parental perceptions of [childhood obesity](#) generated from the United Kingdom, Australia, Italy, and the United States, Jessica Doolen, MSN, FNP, Patricia T. Alpert, DrPH, APN, FAANP, and Sally K. Miller, PhD, APN, FAANP, found that parents were more likely to misperceive their child's weight, regardless of the child's age. Across the literature, mothers failed to accurately recognize the weight of their at-risk-for-overweight or [overweight children](#).

In a comparison of two studies they examined, they found that in the UK only 1.9 percent of parents with children at risk for overweight and 17.1 percent of parents with overweight children accurately identified their child as being at risk for or overweight. In another study, the researchers made note of an interesting finding in the study conducted in

Westchester County, New York. In that study the parents who had concern for their child's excess weight, 76 percent thought this concern was similar to concerns about sunburn, while 67 percent found concerns about weight similar to prolonged television watching.

The researchers noted several common themes from their analyses. Parents' inability to recognize their child's risk for obesity was especially pronounced if the parents themselves were overweight. Also, children of more highly educated parents were less likely to be overweight or at risk. Cultural influences also affected parents' perceptions of children's weight, with black women being more satisfied with their larger size than white women.

A multitude of [risk factors](#) put children at risk for weight gain, and parental misperception may be one of them. "If parents do not recognize their child as at risk for overweight or overweight, they cannot intervene to diminish the risk factors for pediatric obesity and its related complications," the authors conclude.

More information: This study is published in the March 2009 issue of *the Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners*.

Source: Wiley ([news](#) : [web](#))

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