

Parents fail to recognize their children's burgeoning weight

July 15 2009

Despite constant warnings about childhood obesity, too many Australian parents are still oblivious to the fact their children are overweight, according to the findings of the national MBF Healthwatch survey.

The disturbing results showed that only 7.9% of children were considered to be overweight by their [parents](#). However, this is a gross underestimation according to the recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report , which showed almost a quarter of all children (aged two to 12) are overweight or obese.

Bupa Australia* Chief Medical Officer Dr Christine Bennett said, "Parents need to be extremely conscious that their failure to recognise these weight problems can be potentially damaging to their children in the long-term.

"Even taking into account recent suggestions that measures of overweight might be including some children on the border, many parents don't pick up on the risk.

"And once children become overweight, it's often extremely difficult for them to shed these excess kilos, particularly if their diet is incorrect and they are living a sedentary [lifestyle](#).

"Therefore, it's incumbent upon us as parents to help ensure our children embrace healthier lifestyles," she said.

Dr Bennett also expressed dismay that parents' inability to recognise weight issues was markedly more pronounced with their sons.

This was typified by the fact that considerably more parents believe their daughters are overweight (10.3%), compared to their male siblings (5.5%).

In contrast, the AIHW data showed there was little difference in the prevalence of overweight or obesity between boys and girls.

Dr Bennett said she was particularly concerned regarding parents' perceptions of infants (aged up to two years old), with not one parent recognising that their son was overweight, compared to 8% for daughters.

"It is genuinely concerning that parents are more conscious of their daughters' weight than their sons, and this has to change," Dr Bennett said.

"Unfortunately, this may mean an overwhelming number of boys experiencing weight problems will not receive timely assistance to rectify the problem as a direct result of their parents' failure to recognise and address the problem at a young age."

She went on to say that overweight children have a significantly higher chance of developing long-term health problems and that obesity can have a major impact on how children feel about themselves and interact with others.

The main causes of [childhood obesity](#) include a lack of physical activity, poor diet - including high fat and sugary food choices - and family eating habits.

To help overcome this, Dr Bennett encouraged parents to:

- Lead by example and start eating healthier options
- Ensure families eat meals together as often as possible
- Encourage children to eat a healthy and balanced diet
- Allow children to choose which activities they want to be involved in
- Restrict time spent in front of a computer or the TV to two hours a day
- Make exercise fun and reward children for their efforts.

Additionally, Dr Bennett said MBF had a link to a body mass index (BMI) calculator for [children](#) on its website via www.mbf.com.au/bmi.

"I would strongly encourage parents to consider talking to their GP if their child's BMI is outside the healthy weight range for their age and sex," she said.

Source: Research Australia ([news](#) : [web](#))

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