

Few parents recall being told by doctors that their child is overweight

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Dr. Eliana Perrin of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is lead author of the study. Credit: Photo by Tom Hughes/UNC Health Care

A new analysis of national survey data finds that less than one-quarter of parents of overweight children recall ever being told by a doctor or other health care provider that their children were overweight.

And although that percentage has increased over the last 10 years, more improvement is needed, said Eliana M. Perrin, MD, MPH, associate professor in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine, [pediatrician](#) at North Carolina Children's Hospital, and lead author of the study.

"Parents might be more motivated to follow [healthy eating](#) and activity advice if they knew their children were overweight, but very few parents

of [overweight children](#) say they have ever heard that from their doctor," Perrin said.

"As [health care providers](#), it's our job to screen for [overweight and obesity](#) and communicate those screening results in sensitive ways, and we are clearly either not doing it or not doing it in a way that families can hear or remember. While we've done better in recent years, clearly there's more work to be done."

The study was published online ahead of print on Dec. 5, 2011, by the journal *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

Perrin and UNC-Chapel Hill study co-authors Asheley Cockrell Skinner, PhD, and Michael J. Steiner, MD, performed a secondary statistical analysis of data collected from 4,985 children ages 2 to 15 years old who had a body mass index (BMI) at or above the 85th percentile based on measured height and weight. These data were collected as part of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) from 1999 to 2008.

During that time, only 22 percent of parents reported that a doctor or other health professional told them their child was overweight. However, this percentage increased from 19.4 percent in 1999 to 23.4 percent in 2004, and then to 29.1 percent in 2007-2008. Even among parents of very obese children, only 58 percent recall a doctor telling them.

In future research, Perrin said, "We need to figure out two things: How much does communication of weight status influence parents' behaviors? And, if hearing that their children are overweight is as big a wakeup call to changing lifestyle as we know from some other small studies, we need to figure out where this communication is breaking down so we can do better in the future. Our research group is working on both those issues."

Provided by University of North Carolina School of Medicine

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