

# Parents' views sought on childhood obesity risk

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A new website has been launched to help raise awareness of work being done in the East Midlands region of the UK to tackle childhood obesity and to seek the views of parents and healthcare professionals.

It follows a study investigating the prevention of childhood [overweight and obesity](#), led by a team of researchers led by academics at The University of Nottingham. One-quarter of babies [gain weight](#) more rapidly than they should during the first four months of their lives and this has been linked to a greater risk of them developing [childhood obesity](#).

Sarah Redsell, Principal Research Fellow in The University of Nottingham's School of Nursing and Midwifery and a Registered Health Visitor, said: "We are keen to hear parents' opinions about whether or not [healthcare professionals](#) should be trying to prevent childhood obesity by identifying babies who may be at risk."

The Early Prediction and Prevention of Obesity during Childhood (EPPOC) research project explored local parents' and healthcare professionals' views about identifying babies under the age of one who are at risk of being obese in childhood and what could be done to address the problem.

The research team ran focus groups across Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire during which they spoke to 38 parents about their babies size, growth and feeding. The sessions revealed that some parents had

concerns over whether [breast milk](#) was sufficient for some babies' contentment and growth and were confused over when to start weaning their child. There were some parents who believed larger or chubbier babies were more desirable. Some parents believed that crying almost always indicated hunger and did not consider alternative explanations for their babies' distress. In addition, parents seemed uncertain about whether and how healthcare professionals should act on the early signs that babies could be at risk of becoming obese as children.

The focus groups highlighted that additional advice may be needed to help parents understand the physiology of breast feeding, how to differentiate between babies crying because they are hungry and other causes and the timing of weaning. Parents also requested greater guidance on how to recognise and prepare healthy foods and keep their babies physically active. (The full copy of this paper is available from [www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/10/711/](http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/10/711/))

The research team also carried out a survey of 116 healthcare professionals including GPs, practice nurses, health visitors and nursery and community nurses working in Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. The survey showed that GPs were asked for advice on feeding by parents of babies less frequently than health visitors and nursery nurses despite knowing more about the health risks of obesity. Conversely, health visitors and nursery nurses were more confident than GPs and other nurses about providing parents with advice about feeding their babies but were less knowledgeable about the health risks of obesity.

In addition, interviews with 12 GPs and six practice nurses revealed they believed that advising parents on how to feed their babies and obesity prevention was health visitors' work. GPs interviewed for this study reported that at the time no formal training was available to help them advise parents about feeding their babies. They considered their relationship with parents a high priority and were unsure about

intervening with those whose [babies](#) might be at risk of becoming obese as children.

The survey and interviews highlighted the need for healthcare professionals to be more knowledgeable about the early signs of childhood obesity and that advice to [parents](#) needs to be more consistent. (A full copy of this paper is available at [www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2296/12/54](http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2296/12/54))

Provided by University of Nottingham

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