

Poll: Many Americans don't see their kids as overweight

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Photo: U.S. Centers
for Disease Control
and Prevention

But national statistics contend that there's an obesity epidemic among children.

(HealthDay)—Many American parents fail to see that their children are overweight or obese, a new poll finds.

Only 15 percent of [parents](#) said their children are a little or very [overweight](#), but [national statistics](#) suggest that 32 percent of kids are overweight or even obese, according to the researchers.

In addition, only 20 percent of children in the survey had a parent who was worried that his or her child will be overweight as an adult.

However, an estimated 69 percent of American adults are overweight, including 36 percent who are obese and 6 percent who are extremely

obese.

The [poll results](#) suggest that many parents underestimate their children's current risk for being overweight or obese, and how that risk could continue to affect them as adults, the researchers said.

The survey, conducted by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Harvard School of Public Health and NPR, asked parents about their children, ages 2 to 17.

"We know that nearly one in three kids in America is overweight or obese, and that's a [national emergency](#)," Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, said in a foundation news release.

"Better nutrition and more physical activity can help turn this epidemic around, and parents have a unique role to play. Knowing the risks of obesity and dealing with the issue proactively can improve kids' health now and prevent serious problems down the road," she said.

Gillian SteelFisher is assistant director of the Harvard Opinion Research Program and a research scientist in the Harvard School of Public Health's Department of Health Policy and Management. She said in the news release: "People often have a hard time making the connection between national problems and their own families. Tackling these [blind spots](#) can be a difficult, even if necessary, element of public education."

Even though nearly all the parents in the poll agreed that it's important for their children to have eating and exercise habits that help them maintain or achieve a healthy weight, 44 percent of parents said it was difficult to make sure their children have a healthy diet and 36 percent of parents said it was a challenge to make sure their children get enough exercise.

The poll also found that between 3 p.m. and bedtime, 60 percent of children ate or drank something that can lead to unhealthy weight gain.

Parents listed a number of challenges they face in trying to help their children maintain or achieve a healthy weight: food advertising (43 percent); foods offered at lunch at school (33 percent); the costs of team sports, gym memberships or exercise equipment (33 percent); lack of good sidewalks near home (31 percent); too few places that serve healthy foods where children can spend time with friends (31 percent).

Seventy percent of children in the survey live in households where the family eats dinner together at home on a given night, but 24 percent of the families had the TV on during dinner, or someone used a cellphone, laptop or an iPod during dinner. Only 46 percent of the children live in homes where the family eats together without these distractions.

Research suggests that meals without TV and other distractions are associated with lower obesity rates.

Nearly all—96 percent—of the children in the survey had attended family events in the past year where foods with high levels of fat or sugar (such as chips, fried foods, fast foods and sweets) were served. Among those [children](#), 48 percent live in homes where the parent feels that "family celebrations are a time to take a break from being concerned about eating in a way that can lead to unhealthy weight gain," the researchers found.

More information: The Nemours Foundation has more about [your child's weight](#).

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