

One out of two parents do not see their child's weight problems

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One out of two parents do not see their child's weight problem. Credit: The University of Gothenburg

One out of two parents of children with overweight feel that their child's weight is normal. Four out of ten parents of children with overweight or obesity are even worried that their child will get too thin. These are the findings of a European study of parents of more than 16,000 children, including 1,800 children from Sweden.

Susann Regber has worked for many years with children with obesity as a pediatric nurse. In her dissertation at Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, she studied the [parents'](#) role in the health-promoting and disease-prevention work against [child](#) obesity in young children.

The research is a part of a European study that comprises a total of 16,220 children in the ages 2-9, of which 1,800 live in Partille, Alingsås and Mölndal in Sweden.

Estimate the weight status

In Susann Regber's dissertation, the parents were asked to estimate their child's [weight status](#) and health, and to describe their own worries about their child's becoming overweight or underweight. The parents' perceptions were then compared with the children's actual measurements.

Among other findings, the studies show that:

- Around 40 per cent of parents of children with both [overweight and obesity](#) are worried that the child will become underweight. Among parents of children who are already underweight, the proportion that are worried about it is 33 per cent.
- One out of two parents of a child with overweight in Central and Northern Europe perceived their child's weight as normal. In Southern Europe, the same figure was 75 per cent.

Major significance

"How parents perceive their child's weight status is of major significance to being able to promote a healthy weight development. Our studies show that the parents' insight into obesity in their children indeed grows in pace with the child's age and higher BMI in the child, but also that a weight development at preschool age can go from overweight to obesity without necessary lifestyle changes being made," says Susann Regber, who is presenting the findings in her dissertation:

"Many parents simply do not see the increase in growth, and are dependent on objective information from, for instance, child welfare centers and school health care to act." A simple measure may be to introduce a routine in pediatric and school health care to always show the child's BMI curve to the parents.

Many obstacles to healthy habits

As a part of the studies, the researchers arranged group discussions with children and parents. In the talks, the parents emphasized that there are many obstacles to being able to maintain [healthy eating habits](#): long working days, financial limitations, and the constant availability and marketing of unhealthy food and drinks.

Another problem that was brought up was that other family members, like spouses and grandparents, broke the rules set up in the home.

"But the parents also emphasized examples that promoted [good eating habits](#), like children being served good, healthy food at day-care and in school," says Susann Regber.

The findings in this dissertation are based on the European research

project IDEFICS, where researchers from various parts of Europe are studying lifestyle, diet and [obesity](#) as well as their health effects on [children](#) between the ages of 2 and 10 years.

More information: Link to dissertation: hdl.handle.net/2077/34815

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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