

Baby Got Fat ... And You Can't Deny



By *Lila Abassi* — December 18, 2015



obese children via [shutterstock](#) [1]

A recent [study](#) [2] published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* aimed to determine if parents perception of their child s body mass index, or BMI a calculation based on height and weight, a widely used measure of obesity is associated with any intention to change their child s weight.

The study authors collected data from 4,437 parents of children aged 5 to 15 years old from 2009 to 2012 as part of the Western Australian Health and Wellbeing Surveillance System. The survey questions included what parents thought their child s height and weight were; whether their child was under-, normal-, over-, or very overweight; and whether they intended to intervene regarding their child s weight.

Some interesting results revealed that overweight kids were perceived to be normal weight about 72 percent of the time, and for very overweight/obese children their weight was considered normal by their parents 66 percent of the time.

All the parents who acknowledged that their child was very overweight wanted to help their kids shed the pounds. Parents that reported their kid as overweight intended to help them lose weight 61 percent of the time. Fifty six percent of the parents who reported BMIs in the very overweight/obese category had *no* intention of helping their kids lose weight, and the results were similar for parents who classified their child s BMI in the overweight category, with 55 percent having *no* intention of intervening.

The inaction based on misguided perception is of major concern, according to Christina Pollard, MD, of the Department of Health in Western Australia and Curtin University School of Public Health in Perth. Taking action to improve diet and physical activity during childhood can help

children avoid a lifetime of being overweight or obese.

Obesity [3] is one of the most important public health concerns in America and Europe, and is a growing problem in the Third World as well. The significant conditions, which are simultaneously present with obesity, make it a critical priority in implementing intervention methods via counseling and treatment.

Currently, one third of American children are overweight or obese, as are one quarter of Western Australian children. Many, but not all, of these kids grow up to be overweight or obese adults who frequently go on to develop chronic diseases that rob them of a decent quality of life and help contribute to an early death.

Most cases of obesity are due to environmental factors such as sedentary lifestyles or high calorie diets, which are modifiable. Especially, in this age of heavy reliance on digital entertainment, encouraging less screen time and more active play time can make a big difference.

The authors of the study posit that as mean BMIs continue to increase, so will beliefs that a heavier body weight is healthier. The opposite, however, seems to be true given that popular culture revolves around celebrities and unattainable aesthetics that glorify extreme thinness as a sign of beauty, and a whole industry exists solely to help people try to achieve such unattainable ideals.

Interventions are only as good as the people who enforce them. While promoting healthy eating and increased physical activity for school-aged children and adolescents at school is bound to be impactful, perhaps we ought not discount the benefits of aiming some education toward parents.

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2015/12/18/baby-got-fat-and-you-cant-deny>

Links

[1] <http://shutterstock.com>

[2]

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/objects.readcube.com/articles/downloaded/wiley/037d0a6a5cd7265934e901fc64da2a4bf32content-type=application%2Fpdf&salt=6c35991f-c69e-4fc4-92ad-2fea86020edf>

[3] <http://www.uptodate.com/contents/definition-epidemiology-and-etiology-of-obesity-in-children-and-adolescents?source=preview&language=en-US&anchor=H1&selectedTitle=1~150#H1>