

Parents foster significant misperceptions of children's weight

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Results of a survey presented at the American College of Gastroenterology's 73rd Annual Scientific Meeting in Orlando revealed that many parents do not accurately perceive their children as overweight or at risk for adulthood obesity. Obesity in the United States is often accompanied by an increased risk of gastrointestinal diseases and has emerged as a major health concern, particularly the issue of obesity among children and adolescents.

Researcher Rona L. Levy, Ph.D. and her colleagues at the University of Washington in Seattle and the University of Minnesota measured parental perceptions of their children's current weight and perceived risk for developing obesity as an adult.

Forty-six parents of children ages 5 to 9 with a body mass index (BMI) in the 70th percentile or higher were recruited for the study. Child height and weight were measured during a routine pediatric clinic visit. Parents were mailed a series of questionnaires, which included questions on their perception of their child's current weight, and whether they perceived that their child was at risk for developing obesity as an adult.

Dr. Levy and her research team found that even though all of the children had elevated BMI, less than 13 percent of the parents of overweight kids reported their child as currently overweight. Fewer than one-third perceived that their child's risk for adult obesity was above average or very high.

"Clearly there is a significant misperception by parents of their child's weight and risk for obesity," said Dr. Levy. "If we are going to address the growing epidemic of childhood obesity, parents' description and awareness of their children's overweight will have to be much more accurate," said Dr. Levy.

Source: American College of Gastroenterology

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