

Suburbs / Downers Grove / Downers Grove Community

# From the community: How parents' perceptions impact child's future weight gain

By **Community Contributor Advocate Good Samaritan Hospital**

APRIL 27, 2016, 9:08 AM

**C**hildhood obesity rates continue to rise around the world, leaving parents unable to recognize if their child is a normal size or overweight, according to new research.

**Florida State University** College of Medicine researchers analyzed how parents' perceptions of their child's weight affects future weight gain throughout their childhood.

According to the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**, 12.7 million children and teens in the United States are obese, or 17 percent of kids.

"One consequence of the worldwide obesity pandemic is that more people are now classified as overweight than normal weight in many countries," according to the study. "With overweight now the norm, both medical professionals and the general public have difficulty identifying who is overweight or obese. Consistent with this evidence, parents of children who are overweight often fail to recognize their child as overweight."

Researchers examined data collected from 3,500 children (ages four and five) and their families. During a period of eight years, the child's weight and height measurements were taken every 24 months. In addition, parents reported their perceptions of their child's weight status by describing them as underweight, normal, somewhat overweight, very overweight or don't know.

Three-quarters of the children aged four to five reported a healthy weight. However, 20 percent of those same children were actually overweight or obese even though their parents described them as being a normal weight.

Over time, "children gained more weight if their parents perceived them as overweight," said Angelina Sutin, the study's co-author, in a news release. "It may be more effective for parents to discuss the importance of healthy eating and physical activity for overall health - and provide plenty of opportunities for both in the daily lives of their children - rather than focus specifically on weight."

Dr. Allen Mikhail, a bariatric surgeon at Advocate Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove, Ill., says

that childhood obesity may lead to adult disease processes such as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, hyperlipidemia and sleep apnea. Obese children can also suffer from low self-esteem and social discrimination, according to pediatric specialists at Advocate Children's Hospital.

"It is important to intervene early on obesity to reverse this medical process, as treatments were not intended or studied for young patients to be continuously taken into adulthood," says Mikhail.

In order to help children eat better and be more active, Mikhail says parents can serve as positive role models by leading their family to live a healthier lifestyle.

Dr. Mikhail offers the following suggestions:

Plan out nutritious meals for the week to eliminate trips for fast food.

Decrease the amount of processed food and junk food available at home.

Focus on lean protein, whole grains, fruits and vegetables.

Pre-pack snacks such as grapes, baby carrots, cucumber slices or trail mix.

Stop purchasing sugar-sweetened drinks.

Set fitness goals for each family member. Children need one hour of physical activity a day, while adults need 30 minutes.

Limit screen time on phones, television and computers to two hours or less a day.

"It's important to build a foundation for a healthy lifestyle when children are young. Take your kids on a bike ride, a nature hike or spend time at the playground," says Dr. Mikhail. "Now is also the time to instill nutritious eating habits. Learning to enjoy fruits and vegetables along with physical activity at a young age will have a positive impact throughout their entire life."

*This item was posted by a community contributor. To read more about community contributors, [click here](#).*

Copyright © 2016, Chicago Tribune

**This article is related to:** [Medical Research](#), [Obesity Research](#), [Nutrition Research](#), [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)