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Research paper

Children's perceptions of weight, obesity, nutrition, physical activity and related health and socio-behavioural factors

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Abstract

Approximately one-third of children in the USA are either overweight or obese. Understanding the perceptions of children is an important factor in reversing this trend.

An online survey was conducted with children to capture their perceptions of weight, overweight, nutrition, physical activity and related socio-behavioural factors.

Within the USA.

US children (n 1224) aged 8–18 years.

Twenty-seven per cent of children reported being overweight; 47·1 % of children overestimated the rate of overweight/obesity among US children. A higher percentage of self-classified overweight children (81·9 %) worried about weight than did self-classified under/normal weight children (31·1 %). Most children (91·1 %) felt that it was important to not be overweight, for both health-related and social-related reasons. The majority of children believed that if someone their age is overweight they will likely be overweight in adulthood (93·1 %); get an illness such as diabetes or heart disease in adulthood (90·2 %); not be able to play sports well (84·5 %); and be teased or made fun of in school (87·8 %). Children focused more on food/drink than physical activity as reasons for overweight at their age. Self-classified overweight children were more likely to have spoken with someone about their weight over the last year than self-classified under/normal weight children.

Children demonstrated good understanding of issues regarding weight, overweight, nutrition, physical activity and related socio-behavioural factors. Their perceptions are important and can be helpful in crafting solutions that will resonate with children.

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Keywords

Childhood obesity; Children's perceptions; Nutrition; Physical activity

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