

Parents Unaware of Danger of Fat Children-Studies

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Millions of children could end up with diabetes, heart disease and other problems linked to being overweight and their parents are not even aware of it, researchers reported on Saturday.

British researchers found that many schoolchildren were overweight but their parents did not believe it, while a U.S. team found hundreds of young teens were overweight, had high blood pressure or high cholesterol.

The studies suggest better education was needed to stop epidemics of obesity, diabetes and heart disease that are sweeping the globe, scientists were told at a meeting of the American Diabetes Association in Orlando, Florida.

"When parents do not recognize overweight and obesity in their children -- as up to three-quarters of the parents in our survey did not -- we are missing critical partners in our effort to halt a developing epidemic," said Alison Jeffery, senior research nurse on a study of 300 children and their families in the British city of Plymouth.

Her team has studied the children for 12 years, starting at an average age of 4.9 years.

Like the rest of the British population, close to two-thirds of the children were overweight or obese.

But one-third of mothers and half the fathers who were either overweight or obese rated themselves "about right." A third of obese girls and half of the obese boys also were rated by their parents as weighing "about right."

"When the weight that physicians know to be hazardously overweight is considered normal weight by the general public, major health problems are on the horizon," Jeffery said.

A U.S. study had similarly alarming conclusions.

"Our survey of 1,700 eighth grade children in Texas, North Carolina and California found that more than half had one or more problems -- such as being overweight or having cholesterol, blood pressure or blood glucose abnormalities -- that place them at high risk for diabetes and premature cardiovascular disease," said Dr. Francine Kaufman of Children's Hospital of Los Angeles.

Eighth grade children are generally 13 or 14 years old.

They found that 40.2 percent had pre-diabetes, in which blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough for a diagnosis of diabetes.

They hope to start a program of teaching children about proper nutrition and exercise.

Earlier this week a study of nearly 300,000 school children in Arkansas found 40 percent were either overweight or borderline.

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