

RESEARCH SUMMARY:

Overweight and Obesity Rarely Diagnosed by Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder

Childhood obesity is a common problem in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Obesity increases the risk for many long-term health problems. The goal of this study was to determine whether developmental-behavioral pediatricians were addressing weight problems. We looked at whether they diagnosed a child as overweight or obese when these were present.

Data from the electronic health record for 4,542 children with ASD at three DBPNet sites were used in this study. The child's age, sex, height, and weight were obtained from the electronic health record to determine if the child met criteria for being overweight or obese. We also obtained the diagnoses given at the visit for these children.

Overweight or obesity was common, occurring in 36 to 41 percent of the children with ASD in this group. Of these, only about 7 percent of the children were given a diagnosis of overweight or obesity at the visit. Even in those with severe obesity, only about 29 percent were diagnosed with obesity.

These data reflect the diagnoses codes entered into the electronic health record and may not reflect the concerns the doctor and family discussed. However, this low rate of recording the diagnosis raises questions about whether developmental-behavioral pediatricians are making recommendations or referrals related to weight management in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who are overweight or obese.

Reference:

Walls M, Curtin C, Phillips S, Eliasziw M, Jackel C, Must A, Bandini L, Broder-Fingert S. Developmental-Behavioral Pediatricians' Diagnosis and Coding of Overweight and Obesity in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*. 2020 May;41(4):258-264. PMID: 32040046