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**Predicting early childhood obesity at infancy: caregiver perceptions**

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**Background:** One in three 5-year olds in New Zealand are overweight or obese. Models exist to predict an infant's risk of early childhood obesity, but little is known about parental perceptions of these models. The aim of this study was to conduct a survey of New Zealand caregivers' views of early childhood obesity prediction.

**Methods:** Participants, primarily recruited by social media, were parents, grandparents, or caregivers, of children <5 years. Respondents reported their own and their child's weight and height.



**Results:** A total of 1,970 were received. Nearly two-thirds (62.2%) of respondents said they would want to hear if their child was at risk of early childhood obesity. Responses to this question were not associated with ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), or education (all  $p > 0.05$ ). 90.7% of respondents who wanted to know if their child was at risk of obesity, also expected they would experience a negative response to the information. BMI was calculated for 1,289 respondents, and BMI SDS for 649 children. Among respondents with obese children, 94.7% of those who said that they would be concerned if their child was gaining too much weight, also believed that their child's weight gain had been fine.

**Conclusions:** Caregivers of New Zealand children are open to early childhood obesity prediction, and this view was relatively similar irrespective of ethnicity, SES, and education. However, many caregivers expected they would experience at least one negative emotion in response to the information. Despite being concerned about excessive weight gain, many parents of obese children did not consider their child to be gaining too much weight. This finding is in line with numerous studies worldwide, whereby parents fail to recognise obesity in their children. Prevention-focussed early identification of obesity risk may avoid the need for parents to later recognise their child as obese.

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