

Children are not destined to inherit their parents' weight problems

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Credit: Murdoch Children's Research Institute

The children of overweight parents are not destined to inherit their parents' weight problems, according to a new study from the Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

The results of a one-off health assessment of 1,800 Australian children, aged 11 to 12 years, has found that one in four (27 percent) are overweight, but the researchers say it is not evitable that children will inherit the [body shape](#) or weight of their parents.

The Murdoch Children's Research Institute conducted the Child Health

CheckPoint study, which consisted around 20 health tests including body composition, for a national sample of children, aged 11 to 12 years, and one of their parents. Two-thirds (65 percent) of the parents were overweight.

Lead researcher in the study, Dr. Susan Clifford, said previous studies have found overweight parents often had children with higher levels of body fat, however, to date researchers have not been able to agree on how closely children's growth patterns follow their parents.

"It's surprisingly unclear how likely children are to grow to weight about the same as their parents. Previous studies have very different results, with the association (correlation) between child and parent Body Mass Index (BMI) ranging from very low to very high," Dr. Clifford said.

Child Health CheckPoint found only a moderate association between an 11 to 12-year-old child's BMI and their parent's, which was at the lower end of previous estimates.

"This modest similarity between parents and children challenges a pessimism that children will inevitably end up like their overweight parents," Dr. Clifford said.

"Our research suggests that far more than family environment drives the current obesity endemic. Parents are, to some extent, nutritional gatekeepers for their children, but on the other hand, [children](#) spend a lot of time at school and with friends and in other environments not shared with their [parents](#)."

In light of the research results, Dr. Clifford is calling for national and even international banks of data on [body weight](#) and body composition to alert researchers, [health workers](#) and governments in 'near-real-time' of the changing weight trends of the population.

Provided by Murdoch Children's Research Institute

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