

From parent concern for adolescents with high weight to action: A scoping review

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Background:

Parents play a pivotal role in recognising and supporting adolescents with high weight. However, parents frequently underestimate obesity, and exhibit reluctance to seek timely health professional support. This scoping review synthesises the evidence regarding parent-specific triggers of concern about adolescent high weight, and subsequent actions prior to enrolment in a weight management service/program.

Methods:

Four databases were searched to December 2024. Eligible studies described factors influencing parental concern regarding adolescent high weight (10–19 years) and/or examined parental actions taken in response to this concern. Data were synthesised following JBI methodology, using a convergent integrated approach.

Results:

The 29 included studies (k) were conducted across 12 countries, predominantly the United States ($k=10$), and used quantitative ($k=17$) and qualitative methods ($k=12$). Adolescent physical health conditions ($k=15$) such as diabetes, and psychosocial wellbeing ($k=12$) including peer social difficulties, stigma and self-esteem, were the most common triggers for parental concern. Concerns about future health implications as an adult ($k=8$) or low physical activity engagement ($k=8$) were also prominent. Parental actions to address adolescent high weight included dietary related approaches ($k=19$), such as healthy eating, food restriction, and parental encouragement to diet. Parental avoidance of dietary-related strategies was reported in three of these studies, attributed to concerns about potential negative psychosocial implications. Additional parental actions were initial attempts to address adolescent high weight with healthcare professionals ($k=10$), and/or increasing physical activity ($k=7$).

Conclusion:

This review found triggers of parental concern for adolescent high weight varies from physical and/or psychosocial to future health implications. Whereas, parental actions were reported more consistently, with diet related strategies predominantly implemented by parents to address adolescent high weight.

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