



Abstract

# Self-Perceived Parental Dietary Behavior Relates to Diet Quality and Weight Status of Children <sup>†</sup>

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**Abstract:** Background: Parents' own dietary habits have an impact on the diet quality and health of their children. Yet, the relationship between parental self-perceived health consciousness and health in preschool-aged children is not known. Thus, the aim was to study the relation of self-perceived dietary behavior of parents with their pre-school aged children's dietary quality and body adiposity. Methods: Parents of 2–6-year-old children (n = 738) were recruited from child health clinics across Finland. Parents were divided into health-conscious (HC, n = 396) and non-health-conscious (non-HC, n = 342) according to a self-perceived report of following a healthy diet. Semi-structured questionnaires on parental views on their child's diet were collected. Children's diet quality was evaluated with the Children's Index of Diet Quality (CIDQ). Anthropometrics of the children were recorded during the child's health clinic visit. BMI was converted to a BMI standard deviation score (BMI-SDS) and categorized according to the Finnish growth reference curves as well as the categories of the International Task Force (IOTF). Results: Children of HC parents had better diet quality compared to children of non-HC parents ( $11.4 \pm 2.6$  vs.  $10.6 \pm 2.6$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). They also presented lower BMI-SDS values compared to children of non-HC parents ( $-0.02 \pm 1.12$  vs.  $0.19 \pm 1.09$   $p = 0.015$ ). Categories of BMI-SDS according to the Finnish growth charts did not differ between the children of HC and non-HC parents. Yet, the categories of BMI-SDS according to cut-offs defined by the IOTF differed significantly between the HC and non-HC parents: the number of children with underweight was 44 (13.6%), normal weight 233 (72.1%), overweight 30 (9.3%) and obese 16 (5.0%), while the number of children of HC parents who were underweight was 69 (18.6%), normal weight 255 (68.7%), overweight 44 (11.9%) and obese 3 (0.8%). Conclusion: Parental self-perceived health consciousness in terms of healthy eating is related to adiposity and diet quality in children. Self-perceived healthy eating in parents could be one factor to consider when monitoring a child's health in health clinics.



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