



REVIEW ARTICLE

**Mothers' perceptions about the nutritional status of their overweight children: a systematic review**<sup>☆,☆☆</sup>



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**KEYWORDS**

Nutritional status;  
Perception;  
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Maternal;  
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Parental

**Abstract**

*Objective:* this systematic review aims to explore and describe the studies that have as a primary outcome the identification of mothers' perception of the nutritional status of their children.

*Sources:* the PubMed, Embase, LILACS, and SciELO databases were researched, regardless of language or publication date. The terms used for the search, with its variants, were: Nutritional Status, Perception, Mother, Maternal, Parents, Parental.

*Summary of the findings:* after screening of 167 articles, 41 were selected for full text reading, of which 17 were included in the review and involved the evaluation of the perception of mothers on the nutritional status of 57,700 children and adolescents. The methodological quality of the studies ranged from low to excellent. The proportion of mothers who inadequately perceived the nutritional status of their children was high, and was the most common underestimation for children with overweight or obesity.

*Conclusion:* despite the increasing prevalence of obesity in pediatric age, mothers have difficulty in properly perceiving the nutritional status of their children, which may compromise referral to treatment programs.

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**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

Estado nutricional;  
Percepção;  
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Materno;  
Pais;  
Parental

## Percepção de mães sobre o estado nutricional de seus filhos com excesso de peso: revisão sistemática

**Resumo**

**Objetivo:** esta revisão sistemática tem por objetivo explorar e descrever os estudos que apresentam como desfecho primário a identificação da percepção das mães quanto ao estado nutricional de seus filhos.

**Fonte dos dados:** foram utilizadas as bases de dados PubMed, Embase, LILACS e SciELO, sem distinção de idioma ou data de publicação. Os termos utilizados para a busca, com suas variações, foram: *Nutritional Status, Perception, Mother, Maternal, Parents, Parental*.

**Síntese dos dados:** após triagem dos 167 artigos encontrados, restaram 41 artigos para leitura do texto completo, sendo incluídos 17 artigos, que envolveram a avaliação da percepção de mães sobre o estado nutricional de 57.700 crianças e adolescentes. A qualidade metodológica dos artigos variou de baixa a excelente. A proporção de mães que percebiam inadequadamente o estado nutricional dos filhos foi elevada, sendo mais comum a subestimativa para crianças com sobrepeso ou obesidade.

**Conclusão:** apesar do aumento da prevalência de obesidade em faixas pediátricas, as mães têm dificuldade de perceber adequadamente o estado nutricional de seus filhos, o que pode comprometer o encaminhamento para programas de tratamento.

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**Introduction**

Obesity is one of the most common non-communicable chronic diseases in childhood, with a tendency to extend into adulthood,<sup>1,2</sup> resulting in the early onset of other associated chronic diseases, such as hypertension, dyslipidemia, and type 2 diabetes, among other cardiometabolic risk factors.<sup>3-5</sup>

A study conducted in Porto Alegre, state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, demonstrated that obese adolescents from municipal schools had metabolic syndrome prevalence of 51.2% and insulin resistance of 80.1%, very close to the results of other studies performed in Brazil and in other countries.<sup>6</sup>

The prevalence of excess weight has increased in all age groups in Brazil, similar to what has occurred worldwide. Data from the Family Budget Survey<sup>7</sup> has demonstrated that the proportion of obese children has quadrupled in the last 20 years, whereas it has tripled in adolescents during the same period. These findings do not differ significantly from trends observed in developed countries.<sup>8,9</sup>

Considering that the treatment programs for obesity in childhood and adolescence have not shown significant results,<sup>2,10,11</sup> the key point on the fight against this disease should be prevention, based on an active lifestyle and healthy eating habits.<sup>12</sup>

Several studies have demonstrated that obesity is a multifactorial disease, showing a strong association with family dynamics; thus, the success of prevention and treatment programs depends on the involvement of the family as a whole.<sup>13-15</sup> Hence, the first step is the acknowledgement by the parents of the nutritional status of their children, identifying excess weight as a health risk.<sup>16,17</sup>

Not many studies have assessed the mothers' perception of the nutritional status of their children, and most of them have demonstrated that there is a tendency for the mothers

to underestimate the nutritional status of their children, not recognizing their obese children as such.

This fact deserves much attention, since if the parents, particularly the mother, do not recognize their obese children as such, they will not be concerned about referring them for treatment, nor will encourage them to change their lifestyle.<sup>18</sup>

In this sense, this systematic review aimed to investigate and describe the studies that have as primary outcome the identification of mothers' perception regarding the nutritional status of their children.

**Methods**

For the literature review of the perception of mothers about the nutritional status of their children the PubMed, Embase, LILACS, and SciELO databases were researched, regardless of language or publication date. The terms used for the search and their variants were: Nutritional Status, Perception, Mother, Maternal, Parents, and Parental, as described in Fig. 1. The terms were adapted to the search engines in each database used.

The inclusion criteria for this review were: articles that investigated the perception of mothers on the nutritional status of their children; studies of children aged between 2 and 19 years where the outcome was the assessment of the difference between the actual nutritional status (classified by body mass index [BMI]) and nutritional status perceived by the mother.

The estimate of nutritional status by BMI can be performed with different cutoff points obtained in different studies; the criteria most often reported in the literature are those proposed by the International Obesity Task Force (IOTF),<sup>19</sup> by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),<sup>20,21</sup> and by the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>22</sup>

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