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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Body weight perception and body weight control behaviors in adolescents[☆]

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KEYWORDS

Body weight changes;
Weight gain;
Weight loss;
Weight reduction programs;
Health behavior

Abstract

Objective: To investigate the association between the perception of body weight (as above or below the desired) and behaviors for body weight control in adolescents.

Methods: This was a cross-sectional study that included 1051 adolescents (aged 15–19 years) who were high school students attending public schools. The authors collected information on the perception of body weight (dependent variable), weight control behaviors (initiative to change the weight, physical exercise, eating less or cutting calories, fasting for 24h, taking medications, vomiting, or taking laxatives), and measured body weight and height to calculate the body mass index and then classify the weight status. Associations were tested by multinomial logistic regression analysis.

Results: Adolescents of both sexes who perceived their body weight as below the expected weight took more initiatives to gain weight, and those who perceived themselves as overweight made more efforts to lose weight. In adolescents who perceived themselves as overweight, the behavior of not taking medication was associated with the outcome only in boys (OR = 8.12), whereas in girls, an association was observed with the variables eating less, cutting calories, or avoiding fatty foods aiming to lose or avoid increasing body weight (OR = 3.39). Adolescents of both sexes who practiced exercises were more likely to perceive themselves as overweight (male OR = 2.00; OR = 1.93 female).

Conclusion: The perception of the body weight as above and below one's expected weight was associated with weight control behaviors, which were more likely to result in initiatives to lose and gain weight, respectively.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Alterações do peso corporal;
Ganho de peso;
Perda de peso;
Programas de redução de peso;
Comportamentos saudáveis

Percepção do peso corporal e comportamentos para controle de peso em adolescentes**Resumo**

Objetivo: Verificar a associação da percepção (acima ou abaixo) do peso corporal esperado com os comportamentos para controle de peso em adolescentes.

Métodos: Estudo transversal, realizado com 1051 adolescentes (15 a 19 anos), do ensino médio de escolas públicas estaduais. Foram coletadas informações sobre a percepção do peso corporal (variável dependente), comportamentos de controle de peso (iniciativa para mudar o peso, prática de exercícios físicos, comer menos ou cortar calorias, ficar 24h sem comer, tomar medicamentos, vomitar ou tomar laxantes) e aferidas as medidas de massa corporal e estatura para cálculo do índice de massa corporal e classificação do status do peso. As associações foram testadas por meio da regressão logística multinomial.

Resultados: Adolescentes de ambos os sexos com percepção do peso corporal abaixo do peso esperado apresentaram mais iniciativas para ganhar peso e aqueles que se percebiam acima do peso tiveram mais iniciativas para perder peso. Nos adolescentes que se percebiam acima do peso, o comportamento de não tomar medicamento esteve associado ao desfecho apenas nos rapazes (OR = 8,12), enquanto nas moças observou-se associação com comer menos, cortar calorias ou evitar alimentos gordurosos para perder ou para não aumentar o peso corporal (OR = 3,39). Adolescentes de ambos os sexos que realizavam exercício físico tiveram maior chance de se perceber acima do peso (masculino OR = 2,00; feminino OR = 1,93).

Conclusão: A percepção do peso acima e abaixo do peso esperado esteve associada aos comportamentos de controle de peso, onde respectivamente, tinham mais chances em realizar iniciativas para perder e para ganhar peso.

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Introduction

The concern in attaining a body shape that is closer to the standards established by society is frequent among adolescents, who long for an appearance that they consider to be adequate, with specific characteristics for each gender.¹ In seeking the desired body weight, it is common for individuals of this age group to adopt behaviors for weight control, which are most often inadequate and can cause health damages.² Studies have identified that weight control behaviors are associated with body weight perception.²⁻⁴ This body weight perception has been defined as the way an individual perceives his/her own body in relation to the weight status or condition, which can be perceived as above, below, or at the expected weight.⁴⁻⁶

In this sense, research has indicated that the main weight-control behaviors related to body weight perception in adolescents include fasting, dieting, laxative use, physical exercise, and self-medication with diet pills.^{2,7} Additionally, the association of some behaviors such as skipping meals, replacing foods, vomiting, smoking more cigarettes, and going on extreme diets can be observed, specifically in cases where the individual perceives his/her weight as above the expected or overweight.^{3,8} Moreover, there is evidence suggesting that overweight perception is associated with diets for weight control, regardless of the actual weight status.⁹

It is noteworthy that the information about the association between body weight perception and weight control behaviors in adolescents are mainly obtained from studies carried out in Asian^{4,6,8,10,11} and European countries,^{2,3,7} as

well as in the United States.^{8,12} In turn, studies that investigated the association between body weight perception and behaviors related to weight control in Brazil are still scarce. At the national level, there are studies on body weight perception^{13,14} and body weight control habits,^{15,16} analyzed alone. Additionally, in the researched literature, both national and international, no associations were specifically found for body weight perception below the expected and weight control behaviors.

Considering the health risks associated with the way individuals perceive their body weight, especially in relation to the adoption weight control behaviors, it is necessary to identify and monitor the conducts so that there is no damage to the adolescents' health and there is higher awareness by healthcare professionals regarding this age group. Consistent with this need, the aim of this study was to verify the association between body weight perception (above or below the expected) and body weight control behaviors in adolescents.

Materials and methods

This cross-sectional study is part of the macroproject "Brazilian Guide for the Evaluation of Physical Fitness Related to Health and Life Habits - Stage I", approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (protocol No. 746.536/2014), carried out in 2014.

The study population consisted of adolescents attending high school, regularly enrolled in state public schools in the

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