



Mothers' Perceptions of Their Adolescents' Weight Status: Are They Accurate?

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Parent interviews and adolescent surveys (755) were conducted in an ethnically diverse sample from Project EAT (Eating among Teens) to evaluate the accuracy of mothers' perception of adolescent weight status. Adolescent weight status was accurately assessed by 60% of mothers, underestimated by 35% of mothers, and overestimated by 5% of mothers. In multivariate analyses, mothers of female adolescents were about half as likely to underestimate their adolescents' weight status as mothers of male adolescents. Nonoverweight mothers were about half as likely as overweight mothers to underestimate their adolescents' weight status. Most mothers are able to accurately assess their adolescents' weight status; however, adolescent gender and mothers' weight status are related to accuracy. Mothers were more likely to underestimate their sons' weights than their daughters' weights, and overweight mothers were more likely to be inaccurate in their assessments than non-overweight mothers. Findings suggest that the majority of parents do not need to be told that their children are overweight; instead, messages to parents of overweight teens should focus on how to provide support for healthy weight management.

Table 1. Demographic and weight status differences by accuracy of mothers' perception of adolescents' weight status

	Accurate <i>N</i> = 448 (%)	Overestimate <i>N</i> = 32 (%)	Underestimate <i>N</i> = 262 (%)	<i>p</i>
Mothers' race/ethnicity				0.041
White	62.5	5.3	32.2	
African- American	59.8	1.2	39.0	
Hispanic	53.7	3.0	43.3	
Asian	65.5	6.7	27.8	
Other	46.4	5.4	48.2	
Mothers' weight status				<0.0001
Overweight	53.0	3.4	43.6	
Nonoverweight	68.1	5.3	26.6	
Adolescents' gender				<0.01
Female	66.5	3.9	29.6	
Male	53.7	4.8	41.5	
Adolescents' race/ethnicity				<0.01
White	62.7	5.7	31.6	
African-American	61.0	1.6	37.4	
Hispanic	54.1	3.0	42.9	
Asian	66.3	8.6	25.0	
Other	52.5	2.0	45.5	
Adolescents' weight status (BMI %*)				<0.0001
<15%	37.9	62.1	0.0	
15% to 85%	85.4	2.7	11.9	
85% to 95%	28.1	1.4	70.5	
>95%	13.8	0.0	86.2	

* Based on reference data.