Like Mother Like Daughter? Say It Isn’t So …
2010 WomenTALK: National Survey Findings
FACT SHEET

Objective: To assess women’s understanding of the impact of obesity—particularly in terms of influence between women and their children, other family members and friends.

Although the majority of women surveyed seem to understand there is parental influence on obesity, they do not recognize their role in the “cycle of obesity.”

- The majority of women believe a parent’s obesity has an influence on a child’s risk of becoming obese (87%), yet only one-quarter (28%) of women surveyed assign the responsibility to themselves.
- Nearly six out of ten (57%) women believe both mother’s and father’s obesity have an equal influence.
  - Yet research shows a mother’s obesity more significantly impacts a child than a father’s obesity at all ages.¹

Most women don’t seem to recognize how early a mother’s obesity can impact her child’s risk of becoming obese.

- Only one in ten (11%) women surveyed recognizes that a mother’s obesity in her first trimester of pregnancy more than doubles her child’s risk of becoming obese.
- More than half of women surveyed were either unsure of the impact of a mother’s obesity in her first trimester (46%) or believed there was no impact (11%) on her child’s risk for obesity.

Women surveyed understand the role that familial obesity has on their risk for becoming obese, but they underestimate the influence of friends and others.

- Among women surveyed, 80% believe outside relationships can contribute to the likelihood of them becoming obese.
  - Almost three-quarters (72%) of respondents believe an obese family member (parent/sibling) can influence their weight.
  - Sixty percent name a spouse or significant other as a person of influence.
  - Less than one in three (28%) believe an obese friend can influence their weight.
  - In fact, studies show that a person has a much greater chance (57%) of becoming obese if he or she had a friend who became obese than if he/she had a sibling (40%) or spouse (37%) who became obese.²
Women are still unaware of certain secondary diseases associated with obesity.

- While nearly all (97%) women surveyed think there are certain things obese people have an increased risk of developing (high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and heart disease among the highest), less than half of women surveyed understand the increased risk of the following diseases and/or conditions:
  - Infertility (36%)
  - Gallstones (30%)
  - Colon cancer (26%)
  - Breast cancer (23%)
  - Uterine cancer (13%)

Additional Data Regarding Obesity

- According to NHANES data, the prevalence of obesity in 2007-2008 was 32.2% among adult men and 35.5% among adult women.\(^\text{III}\)
- Obesity is on the rise:
  - Obesity among adults has more than doubled in the past 40 years (13% 1960 – 1962 vs. 35% 2005 to 2006)
  - Even more troubling is that obesity among teens has more than tripled in the past 30 years. (5% 1976-1980 to 17% 2003-2006)\(^\text{IV}\)
- Research indicates that roughly one in five women are obese when they get pregnant.\(^\text{V}\) This translates into roughly 1.3 million women annually.\(^\text{VI}\)
- In 2009, the Institute of Medicine revised its guidelines for recommended weight gain during pregnancy. The higher a woman’s BMI score pre-pregnancy, the lower her recommended weight gain during pregnancy. According to the new guidelines, obese women (BMI > 30) should only gain 11–20 pounds during pregnancy.

About the Survey

This survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of HealthyWomen from August 24–26, 2010, among 1,037 women ages 18 and older. This online survey is not based on a probability sample, and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. For complete survey methodology, please contact dcarlton@healthywomen.org.

About HealthyWomen

HealthyWomen (HW) is the nation's leading nonprofit health information source for women. For more than 20 years, women have been coming to HW for answers to their most pressing and personal health care questions. HW provides health information through a wide array of online content and print publications that are original, objective and reviewed and approved by medical experts. Its website, www.HealthyWomen.org®, was recognized by ForbesWoman as one of the “Top 100 Websites for Women” and was named the top women’s health website by Dr. Mehmet Oz in O, The Oprah Magazine and by Good Housekeeping magazine. To learn more, visit www.HealthyWomen.org.

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