

Pediatricians may fail to diagnose obesity in kids, Saint Louis University research shows

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ST. louis -- Many physicians may be missing the chance to talk to obese children and their parents about ways to control the children's weight, according to Saint louis University research reported in Pediatrics.

"It's really important that pediatricians identify overweight children during well-child visits and use that time to talk about healthy weight," says Sarah Barlow, M.D., MPH, assistant professor of pediatrics at Saint louis University School of Medicine, and a study author.

"The pediatrician can start by inquiring of the parent and child if they have any concerns about weight. That would give them a feel for where that family is in terms of their thinking about it."

Dr. Barlow, who specializes in pediatric obesity at SSM Cardinal Glennon children's Hospital, said the study team reviewed the records of nearly 33,000 children who had routine doctor's appointments between 1997 and 2000. They found that a diagnosis of obesity was recorded on charts during less than 1 percent of well-child visits. The national rate of obesity among children at that time was substantially higher -- between 13 and 15 percent.

When doctors diagnosed obesity, they were more likely to talk to patients and their families about diet and exercise, the study found.

"A diagnosis of obesity is the strongest factor associated with diet and exercise counseling," Dr. Barlow says.

The findings, which examined reports from visits in a nationally representative sample of physician visits from 1997 to 2000, were published in July.

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