

Factors associated with overweight and obesity in children under five years old: A rapid review May 2024

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Background

Over one-quarter of children in Wales aged four-to-five years old live with either overweight or obesity.

Living with overweight and obesity can increase the risk of health issues during childhood or adolescence, as well as overweight or obesity during adulthood.



Multiple reviews of **'factors associated' with (a.k.a potential causes of)** child overweight or obesity already exist, but these examine children across a range of ages.

No up-to-date review focuses specifically on these factors when **both the factor and its impact on weight status** were studied in **children under 5 years old**.



The findings from this review may differ from those that include a wider age range.

This work was requested by the **Welsh Government Public Health and Inequalities team** to help inform the **'Healthy Weight, Health Wales'** strategy and delivery plans.

Evidence Base

This review looked at

- **30 systematic reviews**
- **28** of these systematic reviews included studies that were conducted in countries where the findings are likely to be **broadly transferable to the UK**
- included reviews published up until Dec 2023

A thorough and detailed scientific review of existing literature on a particular topic

Key findings

A wide range of
(1) **biological**,
(2) **psychological**,
(3) **environmental and**
(4) **societal**
factors were identified as being associated with
child overweight or obesity.

What is high-certainty evidence?
This is where the review team are very
confident that the written evidence is true to
reality.

Most of the high-certainty evidence found related to **overweight**.
No high-certainty evidence was identified on the factors relating to child **obesity, specifically**.
Further targeted evidence reviews are needed to investigate this.

The **high-certainty evidence** supports:



Helping **women with overweight to lose weight if they are trying to or considering trying to conceive**.



Helping to **reduce rapid weight gain in children during the first 12 months of life**.



Providing **opportunities for children of working mothers to access healthy foods and physical activity**, particularly if the mothers work long hours.

The **moderate-certainty evidence** supports:



Promoting **breastfeeding**.



Promoting **baby-led weaning**.



Monitoring growth in the first 2 years, particularly for babies with catch-up growth.



Reducing regular consumption of **sugary drinks**.



Reducing [unnecessary] rapid weight gain in the first 13 months of life.



Educating and **supporting the wider family** to provide healthier food options and opportunities for play.

For more information and to read the **full report**, click here:
<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2024.10.14.24314839v2>

For a detailed break down of the **evidence base for this review** click here: [Outcomes Map](#)