

**Knowledge, Perceptions, and Practices of Child Care Providers Relative
to the Factors that Cause Childhood Obesity**

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(ABSTRACT)

Childhood obesity is a national epidemic. Many factors contribute to the rise in childhood obesity such as poor nutrition, physical inactivity, and poor role models. Child care providers can be positive role models and educators for children. The Virginia Cooperative Extension is concerned about the health of children and the role that child care providers play in their well-being. The purpose of this study was to assess the knowledge, perceptions, and practices of child care workers relative to the factors that influence childhood obesity. Thirty child care providers participated in five focus groups held throughout Southwest Virginia. Triangulation techniques employing qualitative (focus groups) and quantitative (participatory activities) were utilized. Nutritional concerns, physical inactivity, and illness were the predominant themes related to health concerns for preschoolers. The poor eating habits, colds, and immunizations were ranked as top health concerns. Many providers stated that preschool aged children do not get enough physical activity due to time restraints and a lack of space. Providers did not believe that overweight and obesity were problems in their day care settings, but it was ranked fourth. They did state that overweight and obesity were problems in their communities and among older children. Not eating enough vegetables, sugary foods at breakfast, and picky eaters were the predominant themes for nutrition concerns. Providers ranked eating too much fast or convenience foods, not eating enough fruits and vegetables, and not eating a variety of foods as top nutrition concerns. Participatory activities revealed a lack of basic knowledge such as serving size and number of recommended servings. Only 33.3% correctly answered the serving size for peanut butter, 50% for crackers, 53% for cheese, 34.2% for juice, 17.2% for carrots, and 23.3% for apples. Only 7.4% chose the correct number of servings from the bread group and only 3.1% from the dairy group. Most providers believed they played an integral role in the health/nutritional well-being of the children they worked with. However, some providers did not believe that their own personal health habits influenced the children they worked with. The preferred methods of education for the providers were workshops/trainings, nutrition education kits, and videos. The data obtained from this study will be used to design effective nutrition education strategies for child care providers that will be used by the Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my fiancé, Kevin. Your love and support has enabled me to reach my goals and know no boundaries. You are my motivation and inspiration. I love you!

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