

Weight control behaviors among Overweight, Normal weight and Underweight adolescents in Palestine: Findings from the National Study of Palestinian Schoolchildren (HBSC-WBG2004)

by

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Objective: To examine the relationship between weight control behaviors and self-reported sociodemographic characteristics, weight status and perception of body weight, in a large, representative sample of adolescents in the West Bank and Gaza Strip territories of Palestine.

Method: Self-report measures of sociodemographic characteristics, body weight perception, height and weight and weight-control behaviors were completed by 8885 male and female students aged 12 to 18 years from 405 randomly selected schools as part of the 2003/04 Palestinian Health Behavior in School-aged Children Study (HBSC).

Results: In both genders, dieting to lose weight was common among adolescents and significantly higher among overweight than among underweight or normal weight adolescents. Extreme weight-control behaviors (vomiting, diet pills or laxatives) and smoking were more common among boys than girls, and extreme weight-control behaviors were particularly common among underweight boys. Older adolescents were less likely than younger adolescents to engage in weight-control behaviors. Perception of body weight as too fat was an influential factor in following an unhealthy diet to lose weight.

Conclusion: Practices to control weight, particularly extreme and unhealthy weight-control behaviors are common among adolescents in the Palestinian territories. These findings suggest the need to design appropriate prevention and early intervention programs for adolescents in Palestine.

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