



# **Mothers at large: gendering the 'obesity epidemic' in Aotearoa NZ**

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In 1996, only 40 articles that included the term “obesity” appeared in Australian and New Zealand newspapers; on average, one article every nine days. By 2000, this figure had risen to 339 articles; by 2002, there were 1,438 articles; and in 2005, there were 2,734 articles, or 7.5 articles per day, a 50-fold increase in the reporting on “obesity” in a 10 year period.

(O’Hara and Gregg, 2012: 33)

- 'Obesity danger in NZ'
- 'Startling rise in levels of obesity'
- 'Obesity big issue for kiwis-survey'
- 'Obesity-cancer link found'
- 'Obesity places a heavy burden on all'
- 'Growing obesity threat to planet worries scientists'

- BMI universally applicable and an accurate health indicator
- Being overweight is bad for your health – being slender is good for your health
- Health risks of obesity so great that obesity is a disease in its own right
- Higher than ‘normal’ body weight results from excess consumption and too little exercise.
- Weight-loss desirable, feasible and sustainable

**Weight-centered health paradigm**

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'CONGRATULATIONS! IT'S AN OBESITY-  
TIME BOMB...'

‘the effect of adiposity is manifest in nearly every aspect of female reproductive life whether as a metabolic or reproductive complication or as a technical problem affecting clinical issues such as ultrasonography and surgery’

(Jarvie & Ramsay, 2010, p. 83)

- 'Mum's obesity may have role in baby's deaths'
- 'Overeating while pregnant leads to obese babies'
- 'Big mums risk babies' health'
- 'Some babies already obese in the womb'
- 'Obesity starts in the womb'
- 'State to trim fat by targeting mums to be'
- 'Would you take a pill to stop obesity in the womb'
- 'Obesity, smoking lift stillbirth risk'

**The 'mother' of all problems**



`Pregnant women are packing on too many kilograms, risking their health and that of their babies and costing the health system a fortune. "It's a massive problem," she said. **"It costs the health system millions and millions"**

(NZ Herald, 2011)



'Childhood obesity starts in the womb, with overweight mothers giving birth to fat babies...She said magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans had provided clear evidence that being overweight or obese in pregnancy could result in potentially harmful changes to a baby's fat levels while still in the womb'

(Hope, 2011)

‘Its never too early to start preventing obesity,’ said Stephan Rossner, a professor in the obesity unit at Karolinska Hospital in Sweden who was not connected to the study. **“It may be uncomfortable for mothers to eat less and change their lifestyle, but after nine months they will get a great pay off for their children”**”

(Stuff, 2010)

# **State to trim fat by targeting mums to be**

**‘The Government is set to reduce funding for adult nutrition programmes and will instead target pregnant women to tackle the obesity crisis.’**

**(Vance, 2012)**

**‘What practical improvements can be made to health, education, social and other services, targeted at the preconception period that will improve infant and child outcomes (including maintenance of a healthy body weight)’**

(Parliamentary Health Committee, Inquiry into Preventing Child Abuse and Improving Child Health outcomes, 2012)

**‘new and disturbing opportunities  
for the surveillance, regulation and  
disciplining of ‘threatening’ (fat)  
female bodies’**

(McNaughton, 2011: 180)