

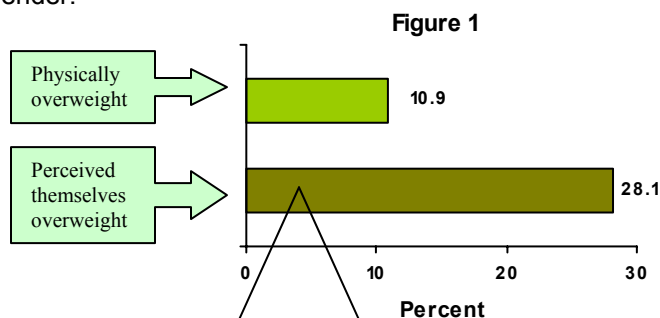
## Self-Perception of Being Overweight and Risky Behaviors Taken to Lose Weight among Florida Public High School Youth

**Introduction:** The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is a self-administered, confidential, school-based survey of Florida public high school students in every odd-numbered year. Data from the 2005 YRBS were used in this report to examine the relationship between the students' self-perception of being overweight and behaviors taken to control their body weight. Some body weight control behaviors are risky, especially for students who perceive themselves as being overweight while they are not (based on their body mass index (BMI)). The information presented here may be useful for overweight/obesity prevention programs to educate students about how to correctly plan healthy body weight maintenance and to prevent unhealthy behaviors for losing body weight.

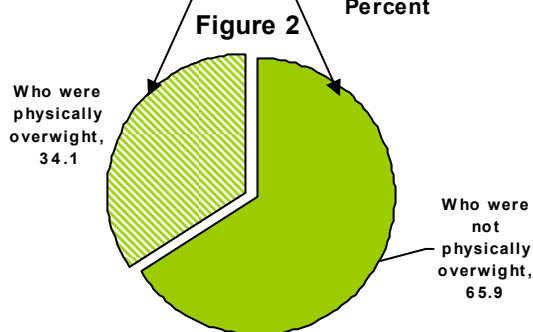
**Definition:** 1) Survey respondents are defined as **perceiving themselves as overweight** when they answer "slightly overweight" or "very overweight" to the question "How do you describe your weight?"; 2) **Physically overweight** is defined as a BMI greater than or equal to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile in weight distribution among a reference population of students having the same age and gender.

**Results:**

1. According to the 2005 Florida YRBS, 28.1 percent of students perceived themselves as overweight, compared to 10.9 percent of students who were physically overweight based on their BMI (Figure 1).



2. Among students who perceived themselves as overweight, only one-third (34.1 percent) were physically overweight, and the remaining two-thirds (65.9 percent) were not physically overweight (Figure 2).



3. Among girls who perceived themselves as overweight, only one-fifth (19.8 percent) were physically overweight (Figure 3a). Among boys who perceived themselves as overweight, half (51.5 percent) were physically overweight (Figure 3b). Girls were more likely than boys to perceive themselves as overweight even though they physically were not.

### Perceived Themselves as Overweight

Figure 3a: Female

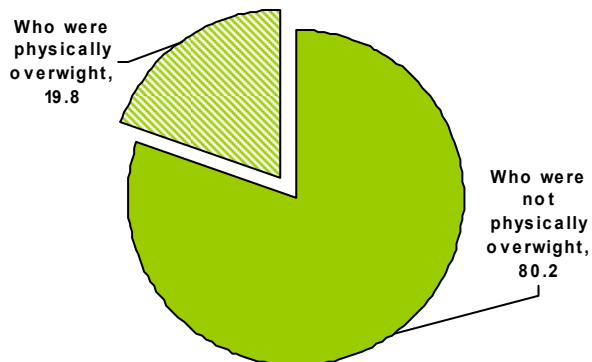
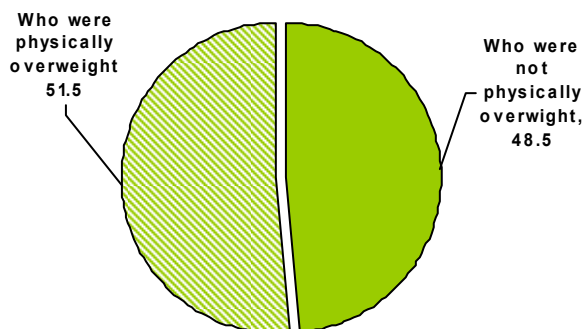


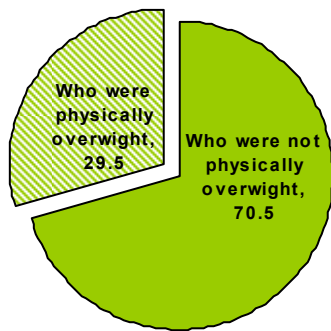
Figure 3b: Male



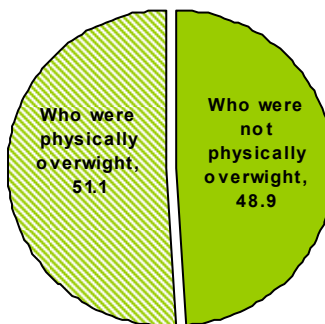
4. Among non-Hispanic White students who perceived themselves as overweight, only 29.5 percent were physically overweight (Figure 4a); among non-Hispanic Black students who perceived themselves as overweight, 51.1 percent were physically overweight (Figure 4b); and among Hispanic students who perceived themselves as overweight, 38.4 percent were physically overweight (Figure 4c). Non-Hispanic White students (70.5 percent) were more likely than non-Hispanic Black students (48.9 percent) to perceive themselves as overweight even though they physically were not.

**Perceived Themselves as Overweight**

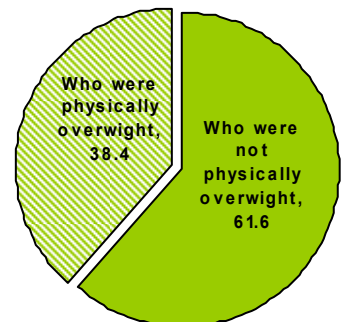
**Figure 4a: Non-Hispanic White**



**Figure 4b: Non-Hispanic Black**



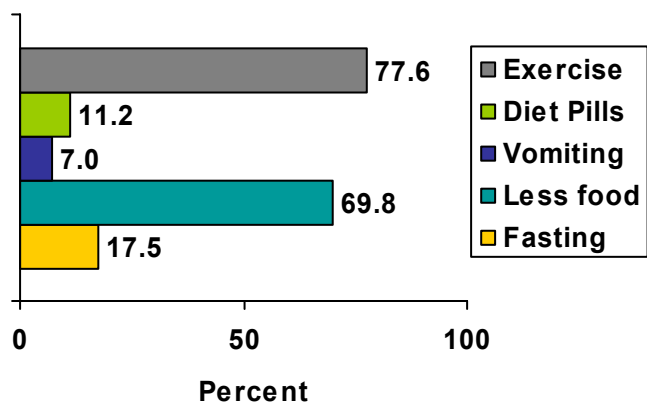
**Figure 4c: Hispanic**



5. Among those students who perceived themselves as overweight, but were not physically overweight, 84.8 percent were trying to lose weight. In the past 30 days:

- 77.6 percent tried to lose weight through exercise.
- 11.2 percent tried to lose weight by taking diet pills, powders, or liquids without a doctor's advice.
- 7.0 percent tried to lose weight by vomiting or taking laxatives.
- 69.8 percent tried to lose weight by eating less food, fewer calories, or foods low in fat.
- 17.5 percent tried to lose weight by going without eating for 24 hours or more (Figure 5).

**Figure 5**



**Conclusions:**

1. Self-perception of being overweight among students may not be correct compared to their actual body weight. Students need to be better educated about how to assess their body weight based on BMI.
2. Among students who perceived themselves as overweight, girls are more likely than boys and non-Hispanic White students are more likely than non-Hispanic Black students to not actually be overweight.
3. Among students who perceived themselves as overweight, but who were not physically overweight, the majority (84.8 percent) were trying to lose weight. Although the majority of these students were trying to lose weight in a healthy manner, groups of these students were also practicing unhealthy risky behaviors to try to lose weight; 17.5 percent reported fasting for 24 hours or more; and 7.0 percent reported trying to lose weight by vomiting or taking laxatives.

For more information about the YRBS, please contact: Ms. Jamie Weitz, M.S., Florida Youth Survey Coordinator, at (850) 245-4444, extension 2424, or by e-mail at [Jamie\\_Weitz@doh.state.fl.us](mailto:Jamie_Weitz@doh.state.fl.us) or Mr. Zhaohui Fan, M.P.H., Epidemiologist, at extension 2418, or by e-mail at [Zhaohui\\_Fan@doh.state.fl.us](mailto:Zhaohui_Fan@doh.state.fl.us). Also, visit our web site at: [www.doh.state.fl.us/disease\\_ctrl/epi/Chronic\\_Disease/YRBS/Intro.htm](http://www.doh.state.fl.us/disease_ctrl/epi/Chronic_Disease/YRBS/Intro.htm). For additional YRBS data, try the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's web site at: [www.cdc.gov/yrbs](http://www.cdc.gov/yrbs).