



## NATIONAL

# Size does matter, says new baby research

Last updated 05:00 26/06/2011

Chubby babies might not be as healthy as people think.

New research out of the United States suggests tubby toddlers end up as obese adults.

The conventional thinking was that a big baby was a healthy baby but Pennsylvania State University childhood obesity researcher Leann Birch said evidence was building that those who gained weight quickly risked becoming obese.

But just as proud parents spring to the defence of their children, other researchers have been quick to dismiss the claims.

"It's well established that the majority of fat kids don't become fat adults, and most fat adults weren't fat kids," Cato Institute scholar Patrick Basham said. "We need to calm down."

He worried at stressing about weight so early. "The focus from an early age on not being fat will only increase the number of young people with eating disorders."

Birch's report said about one in 10 US children under two was overweight, and she urged parents to turn off the television, make sure children exercised, slept and ate well. The situation was worse between two and five, with 20% of children overweight, a rate that had doubled since the 1980s.

The research showed many parents did not realise overweight children were at risk of obesity, increasing the risk of diabetes, heart disease and cancer, and urged doctors to measure weight and length and calculate a baby's body mass index at health visits.

"It's not always easy to tell. There are chubby babies who are doing fine but there are babies who are so chubby they are at risk," Birch said. "Just looking at them doesn't allow you to make that distinction."

Lack of sleep might also be a factor, the report said, with under-threes sleeping less over the past two decades. Babies under two should get nine to 12 hours every 24 hours, and from two to five, 11 to 13 hours. And Birch said more women should breastfeed because it reduced the risk of babies becoming overweight.

Kids should get at least 15 minutes of physically active play every hour. Infants should be allowed to move freely, with appropriate supervision. Cribs, car seats and highchairs should be used only for their intended purposes, and strollers, swing and bouncing chairs used judiciously, the report recommends.