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## Alarming rates of child obesity in Saudi female school children

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**Introduction:** Child obesity is a global problem. Currently 10% of children globally and 17% of children in the USA are overweight or obese. Factors such as fast food, computer dependence, too much television and overwork lead to less time for exercise. In Saudi Arabia, lack of adequate playgrounds and gyms also contribute to the growing obesity problem in the adult Saudi population.

**Materials and Methods:** School children were asked to taste control paper (no PTC) paper strip followed by PTC strip. Subjects were asked to describe the bitterness of PTC paper as no taste, low taste or very bitter taste followed by few questions regarding their family history. Their BMI was also measured according to international standards.

**Summary of Results:** Based on BMI calculations we found 13.9% underweight, 54% normal and 32.8% to be overweight or obese. On further analysis we found 40.6% non-tasters, 31.6% low tasters and 27.8% were supertasters. Among non-tasters we found 47% obese or overweight, among low tasters the number was 28% and the lowest number of obese and/or overweight girls (18.1%) was found among supertasters. As we predicted, the majority of obese or overweight girls were non-tasters and the least overweight or obese girls were found in the supertasters group.

**Conclusions and Recommendations:** 33% of girls were found to be overweight or obese. The percentage of overweight and obese Saudi female children was more than threefold higher than the global children obesity rate and double than the USA child obesity rate. We found most obese or overweight girls to be non-tasters. PTC test may allow us to predict which children are more likely to be obese in the future.

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