

OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

The rise in overweight and obesity is a major public health concern. Obesity is a known risk factor for numerous health problems, including hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, respiratory problems (asthma), musculoskeletal diseases (arthritis) and some forms of cancer. At an individual level, several factors can lead to obesity, including excessive calorie consumption, lack of physical activity, genetic predisposition and disorders of the endocrine system.

Because obesity is associated with higher risks of chronic illnesses, it is linked to significant additional health care costs. There is a time lag between the onset of obesity and related health problems, suggesting that the rise in obesity over the past two decades will mean higher health care costs in the future. Mortality also increases sharply once the overweight threshold is crossed.

Overview

Based on latest available surveys, more than half (50.3%) of the adult population in the OECD report that they are overweight or obese. Among those countries where height and weight were measured, the proportion was even greater, at 55.8%. The prevalence of overweight and obesity among adults exceeds 50% in no less than 19 of 34 OECD countries. In contrast, overweight and obesity rates are much lower in Japan and Korea and in some European countries (France and Switzerland), although even in these countries rates are increasing.

The prevalence of obesity, which presents even greater health risks than overweight, varies tenfold among OECD countries, from a low of 4% in Japan and Korea, to 30% or more in the United States and Mexico. Across the entire OECD region, 17% of the adult population are obese. Average obesity rates among men and women are similar, although there are disparities in some countries. In Chile, Turkey and Mexico, a greater proportion of women are obese, whereas in the Russian Federation, Luxembourg and Spain men are more likely to be obese.

Obesity prevalence has more than doubled over the past 20 years in Australia and New Zealand, and increased by half in the United Kingdom and the United States. Some 20-24% of adults in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and Ireland are obese, about the same rate as in the United States in the early 1990s. Obesity rates in many western European countries have also increased substantially over the past decade. The rapid rise occurred regardless of where levels stood two decades ago. Obesity almost doubled in both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, even though the current rate in the Netherlands is around half that in the United Kingdom.

In most countries, the rise in obesity has affected all population groups, regardless of sex, age, race, income or education level, but to varying extents. Evidence from a number of countries (Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Italy, Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States) indicates that obesity tends to be more common among individuals in disadvantaged socio-economic groups, especially women. There is also a relationship between the number of years spent in full-time education and obesity, with the most educated individuals displaying lower rates. Again, the gradient in obesity is stronger in women than in men.

Definition

Overweight and obesity are defined as excessive weight presenting health risks because of the high proportion of body fat. The most frequently used measure is based on the body mass index (BMI), which is a single number that evaluates an individual's weight in relation to height ($\text{weight}/\text{height}^2$, with weight in kilograms and height in metres). Based on the WHO classification, adults with a BMI between 25 and 30 are defined as overweight, and those with a BMI over 30 as obese.

Comparability

The BMI classification may not be suitable for all ethnic groups, who may be exposed to different levels of health risk for the same level of BMI. The thresholds for adults are also not suitable to measure overweight and obesity among children.

For most countries, overweight and obesity rates are self-reported through estimates of height and weight from population-based health interview surveys. However, around one-third of OECD countries derive their estimates from health examinations. These differences limit data comparability. Estimates from health examinations are generally higher and more reliable than from health interviews.

The following countries use measured data: Australia, Canada, Chile, the Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, New Zealand, the Slovak Republic, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Sources

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Further information

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- OECD Health Statistics.

Websites

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Overweight and obese population aged 15 and above

As a percentage of population aged 15 and above, 2009 or latest available year

	Women			Men			Total		
	Overweight	Obese	Overweight and obese	Overweight	Obese	Overweight and obese	Overweight	Obese	Overweight and obese
Australia	31.0	23.6	54.7	42.2	25.5	67.7	36.7	24.6	61.2
Austria	29.9	12.7	42.6	44.9	12.0	56.9	35.3	12.4	47.7
Belgium	26.0	14.4	40.4	40.6	13.1	53.7	33.1	13.8	46.9
Canada	30.7	23.2	54.0	40.9	25.2	66.1	35.8	24.2	60.0
Chile	33.6	30.7	64.3	45.3	19.2	64.6	39.3	25.1	64.5
Czech Republic	29.0	17.0	46.0	42.0	18.0	60.0	35.0	17.0	52.0
Denmark	26.3	13.1	39.4	40.5	13.7	54.3	33.3	13.4	46.7
Estonia	26.3	18.3	44.6	38.8	17.5	56.3	31.6	18.0	49.6
Finland	31.3	21.1	52.4	46.6	19.3	65.9	39.0	20.2	59.1
France	22.3	11.5	33.8	32.2	10.9	43.1	27.0	11.2	38.2
Germany	29.1	13.8	42.9	44.4	15.7	60.1	36.7	14.7	51.4
Greece	34.8	18.5	53.3	47.2	17.7	64.9	40.7	18.1	58.9
Hungary	30.2	18.3	48.5	38.6	20.8	59.4	34.1	19.5	53.6
Iceland	32.2	21.3	53.5	47.7	18.9	66.6	40.1	20.1	60.2
Ireland	32.0	24.0	56.0	45.0	22.0	67.0	38.0	23.0	61.0
Israel	29.1	14.4	43.5	39.0	13.2	52.2	33.9	13.8	47.7
Italy	27.7	9.3	37.0	45.2	11.3	56.5	36.1	10.3	46.3
Japan	17.3	3.5	20.8	26.1	4.3	30.5	21.2	3.9	25.1
Korea	22.4	4.1	26.4	30.9	3.6	34.5	26.6	3.8	30.5
Luxembourg	29.2	21.0	50.2	42.6	23.6	66.2	36.7	22.5	59.1
Mexico	37.4	34.5	71.9	42.5	24.2	66.7	39.5	30.0	69.5
Netherlands	29.5	12.4	41.9	41.3	11.2	52.5	35.4	11.8	47.2
New Zealand	30.6	27.0	57.6	41.7	26.0	67.7	36.2	26.5	62.6
Norway	27.0	8.0	36.0	43.0	11.0	55.0	35.0	10.0	46.0
Poland	26.6	12.5	39.1	39.5	12.6	52.1	32.8	12.5	45.3
Portugal	31.4	16.1	47.5	41.4	14.6	56.0	36.2	15.4	51.6
Slovak Republic	31.0	16.7	47.7	40.7	17.1	57.8	34.6	16.9	51.5
Slovenia	29.6	15.8	45.4	47.9	17.0	64.9	38.7	16.4	55.1
Spain	29.9	14.7	44.6	45.5	17.3	62.8	37.6	16.0	53.6
Sweden	27.6	10.7	38.3	42.4	11.7	54.1	35.1	11.2	46.3
Switzerland	20.9	7.7	28.6	37.8	8.6	46.3	29.2	8.1	37.3
Turkey	27.4	18.5	45.9	36.9	12.3	49.2	32.4	15.2	47.6
United Kingdom	32.8	23.9	56.7	43.7	22.1	65.8	38.3	23.0	61.3
United States	28.6	35.5	64.1	40.1	32.2	72.3	34.2	33.8	68.0
OECD average	28.8	17.2	46.1	41.3	16.7	58.0	34.9	16.9	51.8
Brazil	28.3	14.0	42.3	37.3	13.7	51.0	32.7	13.9	46.6
China	15.4	3.4	18.8	16.7	2.4	19.1	16.0	2.9	18.9
India	9.8	2.8	12.6	8.0	1.3	9.3	8.9	2.0	10.9
Indonesia	3.6	3.6	..	1.1	1.1	..	2.4	2.4	..
Russian Federation	25.0	20.1	45.1	31.1	11.8	42.9	28.1	15.9	44.0
South Africa	27.5	27.4	54.9	21.0	8.8	29.8	24.3	18.1	42.4

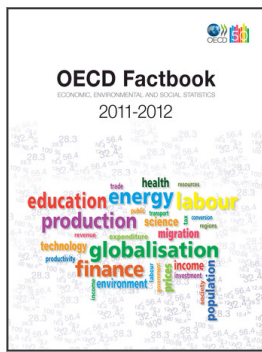
StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932507996>

Obese population aged 15 and above

As a percentage of population aged 15 and above, 2009 or latest available year



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