

## OBESITY

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.

### Definition

The most frequently used measure of overweight and obesity is based on the body mass index (BMI), which is a single number that evaluates an individual's weight status in relation to his or her height (weight/height<sup>2</sup>, with weight in kilograms and height in meters). Based on the WHO current classification, adults with a BMI between 25 and 30 are defined as overweight, and those with a BMI over 30 as obese.

### Overview

Half or more of the adult population is now defined as being either overweight or obese in 13 OECD countries: Mexico, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Greece, New Zealand, Luxembourg, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Portugal, Ireland, Spain and Iceland. By comparison, overweight and obesity rates are much lower in Japan and Korea and in some European countries (France and Switzerland), although overweight and obesity rates are also increasing in these countries. The prevalence of obesity (which presents greater health risks than overweight) varies by a factor of ten among OECD countries, ranging from a low of 3% in Japan and Korea to over 30% in the United States and Mexico.

Based on consistent measures of obesity over time, the rate of obesity has more than doubled over the past twenty years in the United States, while it has almost tripled in Australia and more than tripled in the United Kingdom. Some 20 to 24% of adults in the United Kingdom, Australia, Iceland and Luxembourg are obese, about the same rate as the one prevailing in the United States in the early 1990s. Obesity rates in many European countries have increased substantially over the past decade.

In all countries, more men are overweight than women. However, in almost half of all OECD countries, more women are obese than men. Taking overweight and obesity together, the prevalence for women exceeds that for men only in Mexico and Turkey.

### 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, data on obesity are self-reported through population-based health interviews. The exceptions are Australia, the Czech Republic (2005), Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, the Slovak Republic (2007), the United Kingdom and the United States; in these countries, data are derived from health examinations whereby actual measures are taken of people's height and weight. These differences in data collection methodologies seriously limit comparability of estimates across countries. Estimates of obesity based on health examinations are generally higher and more reliable than those coming from health interviews.

### Sources

- OECD (2009), *OECD Health Data 2009*, OECD, Paris.

### Further information

#### Analytical publications

- Sassi, F. et al. (2009), *The Obesity Epidemic: Analysis of Past and Projected Future Trends in Selected OECD Countries*, OECD Health Working Papers, No. 45, OECD, Paris.
- Sassi, F. et al. (2009), *Education and Obesity in Four OECD Countries*, OECD Health Working Papers, No. 46, OECD, Paris.
- Sassi, F. et al. (2009), *Improving Lifestyles, Tackling Obesity: The Health and Economic Impact of Prevention Strategies*, OECD Health Working Papers, No. 48, OECD, Paris.

#### Statistical publications

- OECD (2009), *Health at a Glance 2009: OECD Indicators*, OECD, Paris.

#### Online databases

- OECD Health Data.

#### Web sites

- OECD Health Data, [www.oecd.org/health/healthdata](http://www.oecd.org/health/healthdata).
- OECD Health at a Glance, [www.oecd.org/health/healthataglance](http://www.oecd.org/health/healthataglance).



### Overweight and obese population aged 15 and above

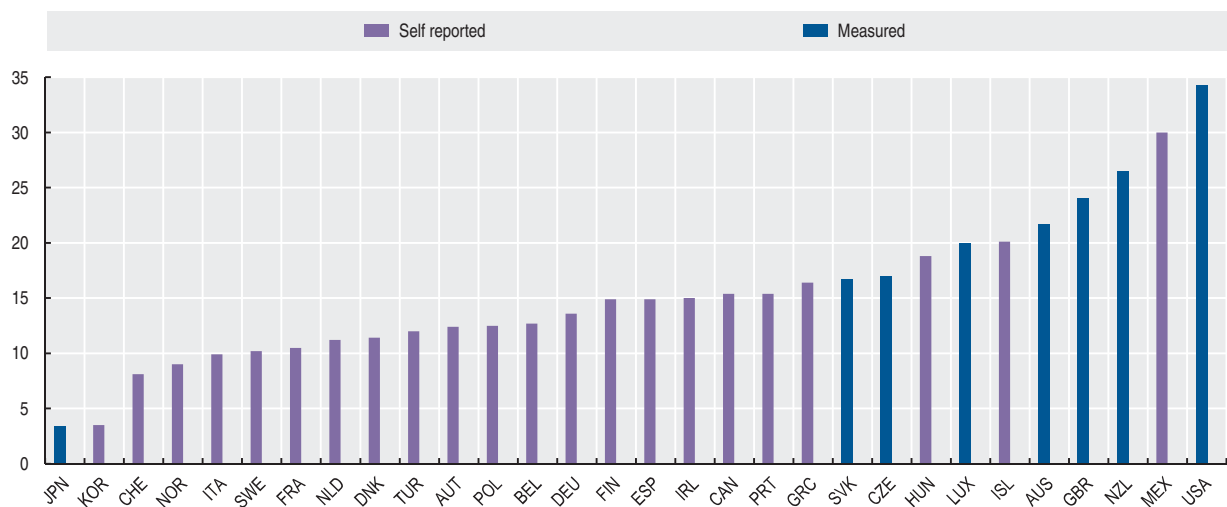
As a percentage of population aged 15 and above, 2007 or latest available year

	Females			Males			Total		
	Overweight	Obese	Overweight and obese	Overweight	Obese	Overweight and obese	Overweight	Obese	Overweight and obese
Australia	28.2	21.4	49.6	45.3	21.9	67.2	36.7	21.7	58.4
Austria	29.9	12.7	42.6	44.9	12.0	56.9	35.3	12.4	47.7
Belgium	24.4	13.4	37.8	38.7	11.9	50.6	31.4	12.7	44.1
Canada	24.9	14.3	39.2	38.0	16.5	54.5	31.4	15.4	46.8
Czech Republic	29.0	17.0	46.0	42.0	18.0	60.0	35.0	17.0	52.0
Denmark	26.4	11.8	38.2	40.9	11.0	51.9	33.2	11.4	44.6
Finland	28.8	14.0	42.8	40.7	16.0	56.7	34.0	14.9	48.9
France	21.2	10.4	31.6	32.0	10.5	42.5	26.5	10.5	37.0
Germany	28.7	12.8	41.5	43.5	14.4	57.9	36.0	13.6	49.6
Greece	34.9	18.3	53.2	48.1	14.3	62.4	41.3	16.4	57.7
Hungary	29.8	18.0	47.8	38.7	19.6	58.3	34.0	18.8	52.8
Iceland	32.2	21.3	53.5	47.7	18.9	66.6	40.1	20.1	60.2
Ireland	28.0	13.0	41.0	43.0	16.0	59.0	36.0	15.0	51.0
Italy	27.6	9.2	36.8	44.3	10.6	54.9	35.6	9.9	45.5
Japan	18.1	3.3	21.4	26.3	3.4	29.7	21.8	3.4	25.1
Korea	23.7	3.3	27.0	30.3	3.7	34.0	27.0	3.5	30.5
Luxembourg	25.6	18.8	44.3	41.5	20.9	62.4	34.7	20.0	54.8
Mexico	37.4	34.5	71.9	42.5	24.2	66.7	39.5	30.0	69.5
Netherlands	27.7	12.2	39.9	40.9	10.2	51.1	34.3	11.2	45.5
New Zealand	30.6	27.0	57.6	41.7	26.0	67.7	36.2	26.5	62.6
Norway	26.0	8.0	34.0	43.0	9.0	52.0	34.0	9.0	43.0
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	24.4	15.9	40.3	39.5	18.1	57.6	29.5	16.7	46.2
Spain	28.6	14.7	43.4	43.6	15.1	58.6	36.2	14.9	51.1
Sweden	26.2	10.1	36.3	41.6	10.3	51.9	33.8	10.2	44.0
Switzerland	20.9	7.7	28.6	37.8	8.6	46.3	29.2	8.1	37.3
Turkey	28.9	14.5	43.4	33.6	9.7	43.3	31.6	12.0	43.4
United Kingdom	32.0	24.4	56.4	41.4	23.6	65.1	36.7	24.0	61.0
United States	26.2	35.3	61.5	40.0	33.3	73.3	33.0	34.3	67.3

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/826752626708>

### Obese population aged 15 and above

As a percentage of population aged 15 and above, 2007 or latest available year



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/822414327028>



**From:**  
**OECD Factbook 2010**  
Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics

**Access the complete publication at:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/factbook-2010-en>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2010), "Obesity", in *OECD Factbook 2010: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/factbook-2010-87-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to [rights@oecd.org](mailto:rights@oecd.org). Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at [info@copyright.com](mailto:info@copyright.com) or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at [contact@cfcopies.com](mailto:contact@cfcopies.com).