



In Focus

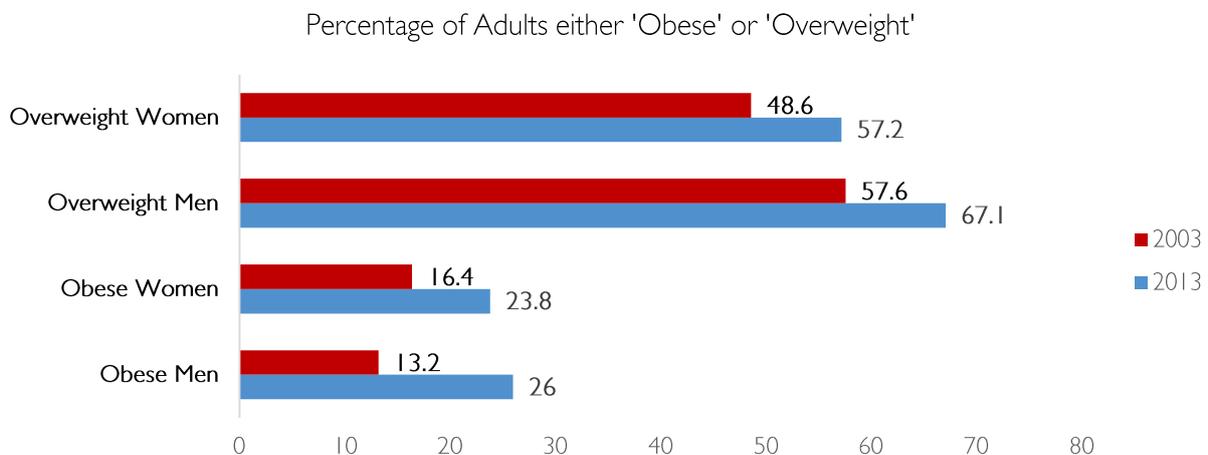
Obesity Levels in England

Overview

The Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) have released new statistics which reveal that the proportion of adults classified as overweight or obese in England appears to have increased significantly over the last decade. Recent findings from the Nuffield Trust have also suggested that the levels of obesity could rise yet further, and that by 2034 approximately 70 percent of adults in England could be classified as either overweight or obese. With many health impacts [reportedly](#) linked to obesity—such as an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes or coronary heart disease—the current cost to the National Health Service of this issue is [estimated](#) to be around £5 billion every year. It has also been suggested that this annual cost could rise to [£9.7 billion by 2050](#).

Measuring Obesity

The [NHS](#) and the [HSCIC](#) use the Body Mass Index (BMI) as a method of calculating whether or not a person is obese. A BMI greater than, or equal to, 25 means that a person is classified as ‘overweight’, and a BMI greater than, or equal to, 30 means that they are classified as ‘obese’. The HSCIC report [Statistics on Obesity, Physical Activity and Diet—England](#) suggested that there has been a “marked increase” in the proportion of adults in England classified as obese over the ten year period examined. The report recorded that between 2003 and 2013, the proportion of adult males who were classified as obese rose from 13.2 percent to 26 percent; for women the rise was 16.4 percent to 23.8 percent. The figures for those classified as overweight showed a similar increase, as illustrated by the graph below (please note that figures for those overweight also includes those who are obese):



(Source: Health and Social Care Information Centre, [Statistics on Obesity, Physical Activity and Diet—England](#), 3 March 2015)

[Figures](#) released by the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP)—which measures the height and weight of approximately one million schoolchildren in England every year—also revealed that 19.1 percent of children aged 10–11 in England were recorded as obese in 2013/14, with a further 14.4 percent deemed overweight. Further, the study reported that 9.5 percent of children aged 4–5 were classified as obese, with another 13.1 percent considered overweight.

Cost of Rising Obesity

The [Nuffield Trust](#) have reported that approximately 70 percent of adults in England are expected to be either overweight or obese by 2034. The Department of Health has [estimated](#) that health problems associated with obesity currently cost the NHS more than £5 billion every year; a figure which [2011 estimates](#) also released by the Department of Health suggested could rise to £9.7 billion by 2050. The Nuffield Trust have also observed that, in addition to the current costs on the NHS, obesity reportedly costs social care a further [£352 million in extra hours of help per year](#).

As reported in the [Guardian](#), a recent study by consultancy firm McKinsey and Company also suggested that obesity is a “greater burden on the UK’s economy than armed violence, war and terrorism”, costing the country nearly £47 billion per year. The study suggested that obesity has the second-largest economic impact on the UK behind smoking, generating an annual loss equivalent to three percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Government Response

The previous coalition Government stated that, by 2020, they wanted to see “[downward trends](#)” in the levels of excess weight in both adults and children. Measures promoted by the Government to that end included giving people advice on healthy diets and physical activity, through the ‘[Change4Life programme](#)’; an attempt to improve labelling on food through the development of a “[consistent front pack labelling system](#)”, to better display the ingredients and the fat, salt and sugar content of food and drink; efforts to “[encourage](#)” high-street businesses to include calorie information on their menu, so that people can “make healthier choices”; and the publication of [guidance](#) from the Chief Medical Officer as to how much physical activity people should regularly be doing.

Many of these measures were set out in the 2011 Government report, [Healthy Lives, Healthy People](#). The publication also emphasised the need for local government to help tackle obesity through the development of local strategies, such as creating sustainable transport plans and allocating more green spaces for physical activity. The report stressed the importance of adopting a “life course approach” to tackle the rise in obesity levels, which would target people in different ways at different stages in their lives, including during pregnancy, adolescence and in later life.

At the time of writing, the new Government has yet to announce any specific measures on tackling obesity following the 2015 general election. However, Ministers have indicated that the Government will put forward plans for an [obesity strategy by the end of the year](#), and that work on a [childhood obesity strategy is also ongoing](#).

Library In Focus are compiled for the benefit of Members of the House of Lords and their personal staff, to provide impartial, politically balanced briefings on a selection of topical subjects. Authors are available to discuss the contents of the Notes with the Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public.

Any comments on In Focus should be sent to the Head of Research Services, House of Lords Library, London, SW1A 0PW or emailed to hlresearchservices@parliament.uk.