

Overweight and obesity pose a major risk to long-term health by increasing the risk of chronic illnesses. In 2005, 7.4 million people aged 18 years and over (54% of the adult population) were classified as overweight or obese, an increase from 5.4 million adults (45% of the adult population) in 1995.

— Australian Social Trends 2007



Reading

- 1 Before reading the text, complete the sentences with your own ideas.

1 Obesity is the result of _____.

2 Lifestyle factors associated with obesity are _____.

3 Obesity affects long-term health by _____.

4 The cost of obesity in Australia was _____.

5 _____ a higher rate of obesity _____.

6 Self-perception of own body weight among men and older women has implications for _____.

Overweight and obesity

Overweight and obesity have become world-wide concerns, reaching epidemic proportions. Obesity is caused by an energy imbalance where energy intake exceeds energy expended over time. This imbalance has been linked to lifestyle factors such as increased consumption of foods with high levels of sugar and saturated fats, as well as a reduction in physical activity.

Overweight and obesity pose a major risk to long-term health by increasing the risk of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers. It has been estimated that obesity and its associated illnesses cost Australian society and governments a total of \$21 billion in 2005. In July 2006, the Australian Government implemented a five-year, \$500 million program, the Australian Better Health Initiative, aimed at reducing the impacts of chronic disease, which includes a focus on promoting healthy weight.

This article discusses adults who were classified as overweight or obese according to their body mass index (BMI), based on self-reported height and weight.

Overweight and obesity trends

In 2004–05, more than half (54%) of all adults, or 7.4 million people aged 18 years and over were either overweight or obese, an increase from 45% (5.4 million adults) in 1995. Using age-standardized data, the rate of overweight adults has increased from 33% in 1995 to 36% in 2004–05, while the rate of obesity in adults has increased from 13% to 18% over the same period. Each of the national health surveys conducted since 1995 has reported a higher rate of overweight and obesity for males than for females.



Perceptions of own weight

For many people, particularly men and older women, self-perception of 'acceptable weight' differs from the standard BMI definitions.

This may have implications for the management of healthy body weight in adults. In 2004–05, more than half of adults (63% of males and 59% of females) considered themselves to be of acceptable weight. The proportion of males (32%) and females (38%) who considered themselves to be overweight was considerably lower than those who were classified as overweight / obese according to their BMI (62% and 45% respectively).

Between 1995 and 2004–05, after adjusting for differences in the age structure of the population, the proportion of people in the overweight and obese BMI categories who considered themselves to be of acceptable weight increased. In 2004–05, almost half (47%) of males and around one-fifth (21%) of females who were overweight or obese considered themselves to be of acceptable weight. This compares with age-standardized rates of around one-third (35%) for males and 12% for females in 1995.

- 2 Now read the text and find the sentences in 1. Compare the text with your own answers.

- 3 Work in pairs. Discuss whether the medical profession alone can change perceptions about lifestyle, weight, exercise, smoking and drinking.