

10 facts on obesity

BMI classification	
Underweight	< 18.5
Normal range	18.5 - 24.9
Overweight	≥ 25.0
<i>Preobese</i>	25.0 - 29.9
Obese	≥ 30.0
<i>Obese class I</i>	30.0 - 34.9
<i>Obese class II</i>	35.0 - 39.9
<i>Obese class III</i>	≥ 40.0

Overweight and obesity are defined as "abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that may impair health"

Body mass index (BMI) – the weight in kilograms divided by the square of the height in meters (kg/m^2) – is a commonly used index to classify overweight and obesity in adults. WHO defines overweight as a BMI equal to or more than 25, and obesity as a BMI equal to or more than 30.



More than 1.4 billion adults were overweight in 2008, and more than half a billion obese

In 2008, more than 1.4 billion adults were overweight and more than half a billion were obese. At least 2.8 million people each year die as a result of being overweight or obese. The prevalence of obesity has nearly doubled between 1980 and 2008. Once associated with high-income countries, obesity is now also prevalent in low- and middle-income countries.



Globally, over 40 million preschool children were overweight in 2008

Childhood obesity is one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21st century. Overweight children are likely to become obese adults. They are more likely than non-overweight children to develop diabetes and cardiovascular diseases at a younger age, which in turn are associated with a higher chance of premature death and disability.



Overweight and obesity are linked to more deaths worldwide than underweight

65% of the world's population live in a country where overweight and obesity kills more people than underweight. This includes all high-income and middle-income countries. Globally, 44% of diabetes, 23% of ischaemic heart disease and 7–41% of certain cancers are attributable to overweight and obesity.



For an individual, obesity is usually the result of an imbalance between calories consumed and calories expended

An increased consumption of highly calorific foods, without an equal increase in physical activity, leads to an unhealthy increase in weight. Decreased levels of physical activity will also result in an energy imbalance and lead to weight gain



Supportive environments and communities are fundamental in shaping people's choices and preventing obesity

Individual responsibility can only have its full effect where people have access to a healthy lifestyle, and are supported to make healthy choices. WHO mobilizes the range of stakeholders who have vital roles to play in shaping healthy environments and making healthier diet options affordable and easily accessible.



Children's choices, diet and physical activity habits are influenced by their surrounding environment

Social and economic development as well as policies in the areas of agriculture, transport, urban planning, environment, education, food processing, distribution and marketing influence children's dietary habits and preferences as well as their physical activity patterns. Increasingly, these influences are promoting unhealthy weight gain leading to a steady rise in the prevalence of childhood obesity.



Eating a healthy diet can help prevent obesity

People can:

- 1) maintain a healthy weight
- 2) limit total fat intake and shift fat consumption away from saturated fats to unsaturated fats
- 3) increase consumption of fruit, vegetables, pulses, whole grains and nuts
- 4) limit the intake of sugar and salt.



Regular physical activity helps maintain a healthy body

People should engage in adequate levels of physical activity throughout their lives. At least 30 minutes of regular, moderate-intensity physical activity on most days reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, colon cancer and breast cancer. Muscle strengthening and balance training can reduce falls and improve mobility among older adults. More activity may be required for weight control.



Curbing the global obesity epidemic requires a population-based multisectoral, multi-disciplinary, and culturally relevant approach

WHO's Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases provides a roadmap to establish and strengthen initiatives for the surveillance, prevention and management of noncommunicable diseases, including obesity.