

Global obesity target not reached if trend continues

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A large network of scientists from around the world have examined the trends of adult Body Mass Index (BMI) in 200 countries. They found that globally the number of individuals with obesity has increased from 105 million to 641 million in the last 40 years. The world has transitioned to more people with obesity than underweight people, with the exception of some sub-Saharan and Asian regions. The authors note that, if the current obesity trends continue, there is little chance of meeting the agreed [global obesity target for 2025](#).

The research network, the [NCD Risk Factor Collaboration](#), led by a group from Imperial College London, collected BMI data from almost 19.2 million men and women. BMI is a widely used indicator of body fatness, calculated by taking into account a person's height and weight*. High values of BMI are associated with an increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease, diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders and some types of cancer. However, low values of BMI can have negative effects on health. The BMI classifications according to the World Health organization are the following:

- < 18.5 - underweight
- 18.5 to 24.9 - healthy weight
- ≥ 25 - overweight
- ≥ 30 - obesity
- ≥ 35 - severe obesity
- ≥ 40 - morbid obesity

Results showed that between 1974 and 2014, the average BMI shifted from 21.7 to 24.2 in men, and from 22.1 to 24.4 in women, corresponding to the “world's population having become on average more than 1.5 kg heavier each decade”. Men in high-income, English speaking countries, and women in Latin America had the most marked increase in BMI per decade, whereas women in southern and central Europe and high income Asia-Pacific had the smallest increases.

Overweight and obesity trends and distribution varied greatly across regions and among countries. In the seventies, the biggest number of people who live with obesity or excess weight lived in the USA, Russia and in European countries such as Germany, the UK, France and Italy. Today, most of the people living with obesity or excess weight live in China, USA, Brazil, Russia and India. India is also the country with the highest number of underweight men and women.

While BMI continues to grow worldwide, since 2000, the high-income countries have seen a slower increase. The authors note that around this time obesity became a problem of public health concern and concrete actions to stop the obesity epidemic started to be implemented. However, interventions and policies have not been able to stop the rise in BMI. If the post 2000 trends continue, 18% of men and 21% of women will be affected by obesity and “ the probability of meeting the [global obesity target](#) by 2025 will be virtually zero.”

The study has revealed alarming statistics and showed that the highest number of people affected by obesity now live in regions where quality health care and medication may not be freely accessible to everyone, and where treating conditions associated with obesity could be more difficult. As a direct result, in these regions more people may badly suffer the negative health, social and economic consequences of obesity. Underweight and its associated health risks to pregnant women and infants still remain a huge global health problem that is largely overshadowed by the obesity epidemic. Lastly, the authors conclude that new policies that could potentially slow down and stop the worldwide increases in BMI are needed.

For further information, please see:

[NCD Risk Factor Collaboration \(2016\). Trends in adult body-mass index in 200 countries from 1975 to 2014: a pooled analysis of 1698 population-based measurement studies with 19.2 million participants. The Lancet, volume 387, no.10026, p1377–1396.](#)