

## HEALTH

### Definition

Overweight and obesity are defined as excessive weight presenting health risks because of the high proportion of body fat.

The most frequently used measure is based on the body mass index (BMI), which is a single number that evaluates an individual's weight in relation to height. For adults, overweight or obese population is the sum of the population with a BMI over 25 kg/m<sup>2</sup>. For most countries, overweight and obesity rates are self-reported through estimates of height and weight from population-based health interview surveys. However, around one-third of OECD countries derive their estimates from health examinations. These differences limit data comparability. Estimates from health examinations are generally higher and more reliable than from health interviews. For further details, see the indicator "Overweight and obesity".

Estimates of the prevalence of child overweight are made by the International Association for the Study of Obesity (IASO). The estimates are based on national surveys of measured height and weight among children.

### Overview

Are people getting healthier? They are certainly living longer – since 1960, life expectancy has increased on average across OECD countries by more than 11 years, although there is a considerable gender gap. Women outlive men on average in OECD countries by nearly six years, at 83 years compared with 77 for men.

The factors that determine individual life expectancy are varied and complex, but lifestyle certainly contributes to whether people live a long and healthy life, men and women alike. Overweight and obesity for example are a factor in a whole range of potentially fatal problems from diabetes to heart disease – severely obese people die 8 to 10 years earlier than those of normal weight, a similar effect to smoking.

Until 1980, fewer than one in ten people in OECD countries were obese, but obesity rates have doubled or even tripled in many countries since then, with 59% of men recorded as being overweight or obese, compared with 47% of women. Furthermore, this is a problem that starts early in life. Overweight and obesity rates have soared among children during the past 30 years. Although rates are less than half the adult level and the gender gap is far narrower, boys are still more likely to be overweight or obese, with 23% of boys aged 5-17 in this category, compared with 21% of girls. Greece has the highest proportion of overweight and obese children, with 45% of boys and 37% of girls, while Turkey has the fewest overweight boys (11%) and Korea the fewest girls (10%).

In the United States, girls are marginally more likely than boys to be overweight or obese, at 36% compared to 35% for

boys. This gap widens and reverses in adulthood, with the United States having the highest proportion of overweight and obese men among OECD countries (74%), while the rate for women is 65%. Mexico has the highest proportion of overweight and obese women (72%) and is the only OECD country where women outnumber men. Japan has the least overweight population, with just 30% of men and 21% of women. Outside the OECD, more than half of Brazilian men (52%) and South African women (55%) are overweight or obese, while in India and Indonesia less than one in ten men are in this category.

Gender and social standing matter in determining how likely adults, and their children, are to be overweight. In several OECD countries, women with little education are two to three times more likely to be overweight than more educated women (such differences are much smaller among men). These women are more likely to have overweight or obese children who themselves will have fewer chances of moving up the social ladder.

The most recent data suggest that obesity rates are levelling off, but gender disparities are still evident.

### Sources

- OECD (2012), *OECD Health Statistics* (database).
- OECD (2012), "OECD Obesity Update 2012", *The Economics of Prevention*, Paris. OECD (2011), *Health at a Glance: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2010), *Obesity and the Economics of Prevention: Fit not Fat*, OECD Publishing.
- See also corresponding table in indicator Health: Overweight and obesity.

### Further information

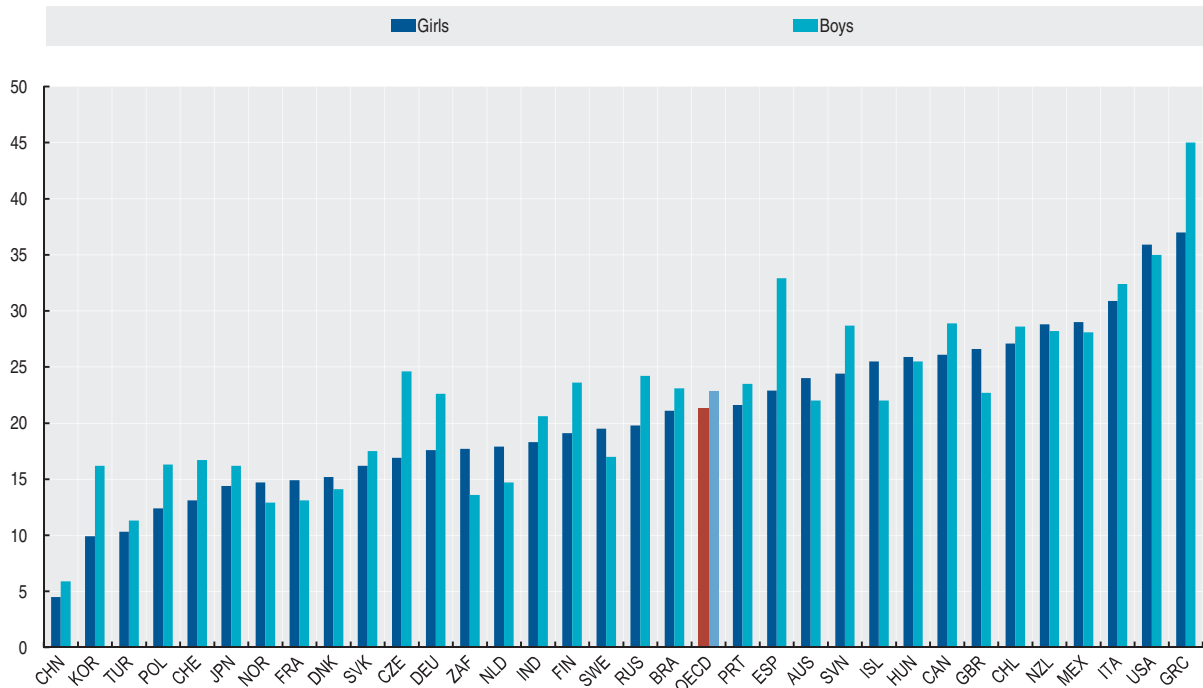
#### Websites

- Health, [www.oecd.org/health](http://www.oecd.org/health).
- OECD Health Data (supplementary material), [www.oecd.org/health/healthdata](http://www.oecd.org/health/healthdata).



### Overweight and obesity among children

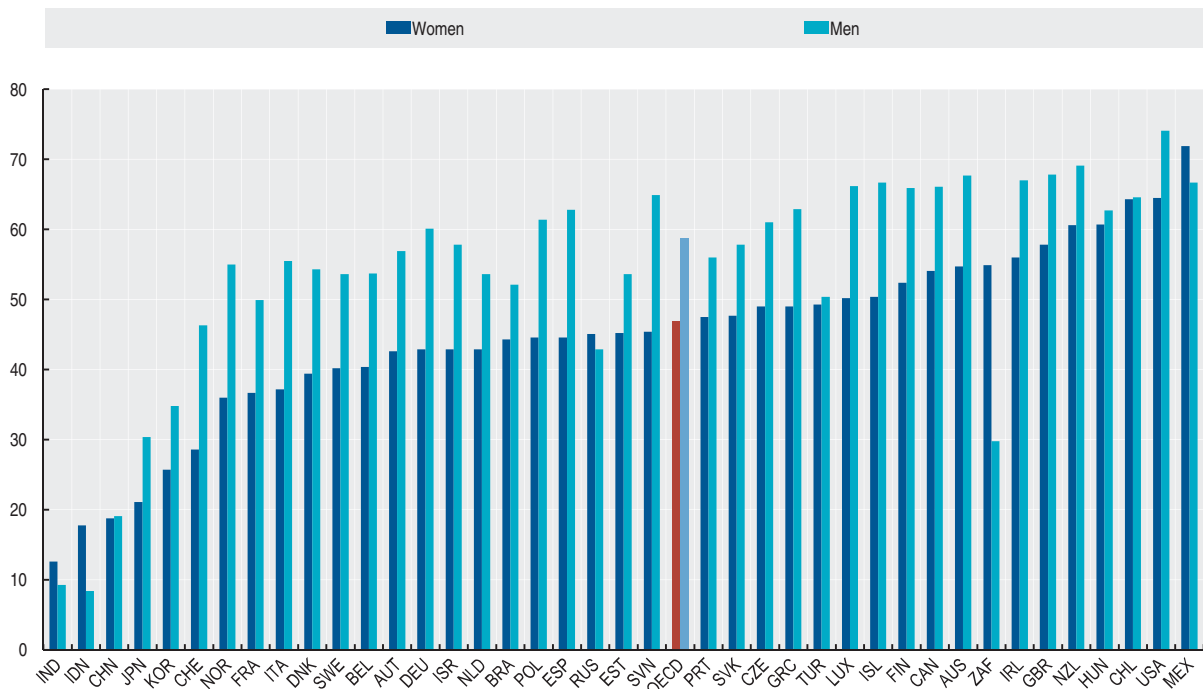
Percent, children aged 5-17 years, overweight or obese, latest available estimates



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932523994>

### Overweight and obesity among adults

Percent, 2010 or latest available year



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932523956>



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