

## **Obesity in America: The Epidemic Continues**

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There is increasing evidence that obesity rates in the United States are stabilizing,<sup>1</sup> after epidemic levels in recent decades, resulting in 35.7% of adults and 16.9% of children being classified as obese.<sup>1</sup> Obesity (BMI > 30) has reached unprecedented levels, as has the prevalence of extreme obesity (BMI of 40+), with 6.3% of the adult population being classified as extremely obese.<sup>2</sup> Although overall obesity rates have increased for the entire U.S. population in recent decades, there are disparities between certain subgroups within the population.

- **Person**

- **Age**

Obesity is most prevalent in middle-aged adults (40 to 59 years old), with 39.5% considered obese. Approximately 30.3% of younger adults (20 to 39 years old) and 35.4% of adults over 60 are considered obese.<sup>1</sup>

- **Gender**

Men and women experience obesity at similar rates with approximately 36% of men and 36% of women being classified as obese.<sup>2</sup> However, there is a disparity among the sexes when it comes to extreme obesity rates, 4% of the male population and 8% of the female population have a BMI of 40 or more.<sup>2</sup>

- **Race/Ethnicity**

The greatest disparity in obesity rates is among races and ethnicities. Asian Americans experience far lower obesity rates than all other racial and ethnic groups with only 10.8% being obese.<sup>1</sup> In U.S. adults over 20 years of age, 34.3% of Whites, 49.5% of Blacks, and 39.1% of Hispanics are obese; and 5.7% of Whites, 13.1% of Blacks, and 5% of Hispanics are extremely obese.<sup>2</sup> Obesity affects 14.3% of White children, 20.2% of Black children, and 22.4% of Latino children.<sup>3</sup>

- **Income Level**

Obesity rates vary across income levels; those who are of a lower income bracket tend to have a higher prevalence of obesity than those who are more affluent. Obesity affects 25.4% of those who make <\$36,000 a year,

23.4% of those who make \$36,000 to <\$90,000 a year, and 19.4% of those who make over \$90,000 a year. Extreme obesity affects 5.2% of those who make <\$36,000 a year, 2.9% of those who make \$36,000 to <\$90,000 a year, and 1.8% of those who make over \$90,000 a year.<sup>4</sup>

- **Place**

The prevalence of obesity varies widely across geographic locations. Disparities can be seen across regions, states, and even within states.

The northeastern and southern regions of the United States have markedly higher obesity rates than the western region. Obesity rates are over 35% in West Virginia and Mississippi and 30% to <35% in North Dakota, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. Obesity rates are the lowest (20% to <25%) in Vermont, Massachusetts, Montana, California, Utah, Hawaii, and Colorado.<sup>5</sup>

Rural regions generally have a higher prevalence of obesity than urban regions. Approximately 39.6% of rural adults are obese compared to the 33.4% of urban adults who are obese—a disparity of 6.2%.<sup>6</sup>

- **Time Trends**

Since the 1960s, the prevalence of obesity in American adults has more than doubled. In 1962, 13.4% of the adult population was obese and about 1% was extremely obese. Today, 35.7% of the adult population is obese and about 6% is extremely obese. Adolescent and childhood obesity rates began to increase in the 1980s, and now hover at approximately 17%.<sup>2</sup>

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