



Overweight and Obesity in the U.S.

Obesity rates have more than doubled in adults and children since the 1970's (National Center for Health Statistics, 2009). While recent estimates suggest that the overall rates of obesity have plateaued or even declined, obesity is widespread and continues to be a leading public health problem in the U.S. (Flegal et al., 2012; Ogden et al., 2012; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2012; Wen et al., 2012). Plus, substantial disparities exist based on demographics (e.g., race-ethnicity, gender), geographic region, and socioeconomic status (SES). See the section on the Relationship Between Poverty and Overweight or Obesity for more information on SES disparities.

Adult Overweight and Obesity in the U.S.

Two-thirds of U.S. adults are overweight or obese (Flegal et al., 2012). In general, rates of overweight and obesity are higher for African-American and Hispanic women than Caucasian women, higher for Hispanic men than Caucasian and African-American men, higher in the South and Midwest, and tend to increase with age (Flegal et al., 2012; Gregg et al., 2009; Sherry et al., 2010). Research also shows that the heaviest Americans have become even heavier the past decade (Beydoun & Wang, 2009).

Racial-Ethnic Disparities

Recent national data show that 82.1 percent of Black women and 75.7 percent of Hispanic women are overweight or obese compared to 59.5 percent of White women (Flegal et al., 2012). In addition, over half of Black women are obese (versus 38.8 percent of Black men and 32.2 percent of White women) (Flegal et al., 2012). Extreme obesity continues to be higher among women (8.1 percent) than men (4.4 percent), especially among Black women who have more than double the rates of extreme obesity as White and Hispanic women (17.8 percent versus 7.1 percent and 6.0 percent) (Flegal et al., 2012). Rates of overweight or obesity are higher for Hispanic men (81.7 percent) compared to Black men (69.9 percent) and White men (74.0 percent), although obesity rates are fairly similar across racial-ethnic groups (Flegal

In the U.S.:

68.8% of adults are overweight or obese;
35.7% are obese.

31.8% of children and adolescents are
overweight or obese; 16.9% are obese.

30.4% of low-income preschoolers are
overweight or obese.

Disparities exist based on race-ethnicity,
gender, age, geographic region, and
socioeconomic status.

et al., 2012).

The table below highlights these and other selected data on adult overweight and obesity from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES).

U.S. Prevalence of Adult Overweight and Obesity (NHANES 2009-2010)

	Overweight or Obesity BMI \geq 25 kg/m ²	Obesity BMI \geq 30 kg/m ²	Extreme Obesity BMI \geq 40 kg/m ²
All	68.8%	35.7%	6.3%
All Females	63.7%	35.8%	8.1%
White (non-Hispanic)	59.5%	32.2%	7.1%
Black (non-Hispanic)	82.1%	58.5%	17.8%
Hispanic	75.7%	41.4%	6.0%
All Males	73.9%	35.5%	4.4%
White (non-Hispanic)	74.0%	36.2%	4.2%
Black (non-Hispanic)	69.9%	38.8%	7.4%
Hispanic	81.7%	37.0%	4.1%

Source: Flegal, K. M., Carroll, M. D., Kit, B.K., & Ogden, C. L. (2012). Prevalence of obesity and trends in the distribution of body mass index among U.S. adults, 1999-2010. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 307(5), 491-497.

Childhood Overweight and Obesity in the U.S.

About a quarter of 2-5 year olds and one-third of school-age children (including adolescents) are overweight or obese in the U.S. (Ogden et al., 2012). About 30 percent of low-income preschoolers are

overweight or obese (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011). Overweight and obesity rates tend to be higher and have increased more rapidly over time among African-American and Hispanic children than Caucasian children (Freedman et al., 2006; Ogden et al., 2012). The prevalence is also higher among children living in the Southern region of the U.S. (e.g., Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky) (Singh et al., 2008).

Racial-Ethnic Disparities

Based on recent national figures, 25.6 percent of White girls are overweight or obese compared to 41.3 percent of Black and 38.6 percent of Hispanic girls (Ogden et al., 2012). About 40 percent of Hispanic boys are overweight or obese, compared to 36.9 percent and 30.1 percent of Black and White boys, respectively (Ogden et al., 2012). Rates are the highest, and very alarming, for 12-19 year old Hispanic boys (42.9 percent are overweight or obese) and 12-19 year old Black girls (45.1 percent are overweight or obese) (Ogden et al., 2012).

While little national data are available on Native American children, several studies have found substantially higher obesity rates compared to the national average and other racial-ethnic groups (Gordon & Oddo, 2012; Smith et al., 2009; Zephier et al., 2006). For example, obesity rates are twice as high for Native American preschoolers than for White or Asian preschoolers (Anderson & Whitaker, 2009). In addition, while obesity risk tends to rise among adult immigrants as they become more acculturated to the American diet and health behaviors (Singh et al., 2011), there is evidence that children of the least acculturated immigrants have a greater risk of obesity than children of natives or settled immigrants, especially among boys, Whites, and Hispanics (Van Hook et al., 2009).

The following table provides some of the most recent data on childhood overweight and obesity from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES).

U.S. Prevalence of Childhood Overweight and Obesity (NHANES 2009-2010)

	Overweight or Obesity BMI-for-age \geq 85th percentile	Obesity BMI-for-age \geq 95th percentile
All	31.8%	16.9%
2-5 year olds	26.7%	12.1%
6-11 year olds	32.6%	18.0%
12-19 year olds	33.6%	18.4%
All Females		

2-19 years old	30.4%	15.0%
White (non-Hispanic)	25.6%	11.7%
Black (non-Hispanic)	41.3%	24.3%
Hispanic	38.6%	18.9%
All Males 2-19 years old	33.0%	18.6%
White (non-Hispanic)	30.1%	16.1%
Black (non-Hispanic)	36.9%	24.3%
Hispanic	39.6%	23.4%

Source: Ogden, C. L., Carroll, M. D., Kit, B.K., & Flegal, K. M. (2012). Prevalence of obesity and trends in body mass index among U.S. children and adolescents, 1999-2010. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 307(5), 483-490.

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