



Behaviours and attitudes towards weight control in WA, 2015

Background

The Nutrition Monitoring Survey Series has been conducted in Western Australia (WA) since 1995 to investigate knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of West Australians relating to food, nutrition and the Australian Dietary Guidelines. The surveys include assessments of dietary change as well as barriers and promoters of dietary change. The most recent survey was conducted in 2015.

The state-wide telephone survey included 1207 participants. One third (33%) of respondents were male and two thirds (67%) were female. Ages ranged from 18 to 64 years, with almost half (45%) residing in the Perth metropolitan area.

Data were weighted for sample design and probability of selection in 2015. Post survey adjustments were made to compensate for under or over representation of gender, age or areas of residence using the 2014 Estimated Resident Population for WA people aged 18 to 64 years.

Recommendations for weight control

The Australian Dietary Guidelines¹ recommend that Australians should achieve and maintain a healthy weight by being physically active and choosing nutritious foods and drinks to meet their energy needs.

Assessment of body fatness

Self-reported Body Mass Index (BMI) values corrected for overestimation of height and underestimation of weight were calculated and used to categorise respondents using the World Health Organization classification system:²

BMI = weight (kg) / height (metres squared)

Underweight:	BMI <18.5
Healthy weight:	BMI = 18.5 to 24.9
Overweight:	BMI = 25 to 29.9
Obese:	BMI ≥30
Overweight and obese:	BMI ≥25

¹ Australian Government. Eat for Health. Australian Dietary Guidelines. Providing the scientific evidence for healthier Australian diets. National Health and Medical Research Council, Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2013.

² World Health Organisation 2000. Obesity: preventing and managing the global epidemic. Report of a WHO Consultation. Technical report series 894. Geneva: WHO.

Key results

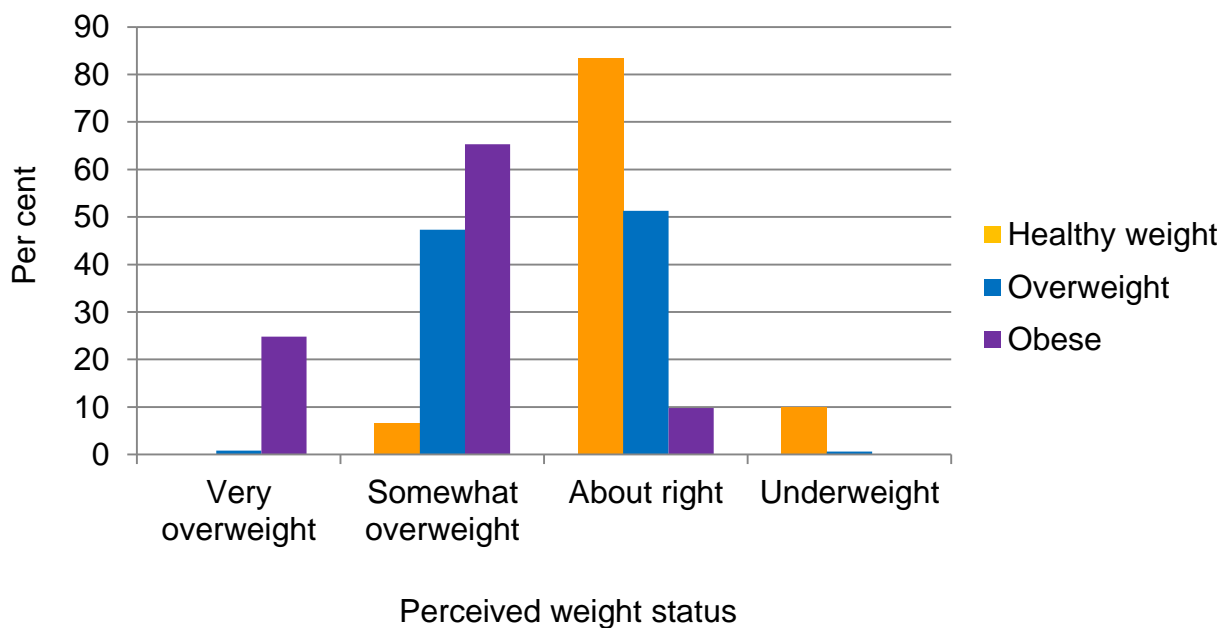
Body Mass Index (BMI)

- Based on self-reported height and weight, 30% of WA adults were classified as healthy weight, 42% were classified as overweight and 28% as obese.

Perceptions of weight

- Half of WA adults (49%) believe their current weight was 'about right', 40% said they were 'somewhat overweight' and 7% said they were 'very overweight'.
- Most WA adults (84%) who were classified as healthy weight reported their weight as 'about right'.
- Half (51%) of those who were classified as overweight saw themselves as 'about the right weight'.
- Two thirds (65%) of respondents who were obese said they were 'somewhat overweight'.
- Only one quarter (25%) of respondents who were classified as obese said they were 'very overweight'.

Figure 1. Perceptions of weight by BMI category, NMSS 2015



Intentions related to weight

- Less than half of WA adults (46%) were 'not thinking about changing their weight'.
- About one third (34%) were 'currently trying to lose weight'.
- Those classified as obese (57%) were more likely than those of other BMI categories (38.8% of overweight and 9.5% healthy weight) to be 'trying to lose weight'.

Attempts to change weight in the last year

- Half of WA adults (50%) said that they had tried to lose weight in the past 12 months
- Females were more likely than males to say that they had tried to lose weight in the past 12 months (60% compared with 40%).
- Three quarters (76%) of WA adults classified as obese had tried to lose weight in the past 12 months.
- Half (52%) of WA adults classified as overweight, and one quarter (25%) of WA adults classified as healthy weight had tried to lose weight in the past 12 months.
- Few WA adults (8%) had tried to gain weight in the past 12 months.
- Adults who had tried to gain weight in the past 12 months were more likely to be male (15% compared with 2% of females) or aged 18 to 34 years (19% compared with 2% or less in other age groups).

Motivations to lose weight in the last year

For those trying to change their weight, the top three reasons reported were:

- to improve health in general (29%)
- to improve fitness (16%)
- to look better (12%).

How Western Australians have tried to lose weight in the last year

For those trying to change their weight, the three most frequently reported steps taken were:

- more exercise (42%)
- change to diet (25%)
- eating smaller portions (12%).

Knowledge of health problems associated with being overweight

- WA adults identified the main health problems associated with overweight or obesity as: heart disease (68%); joint/knee problems (34%); diabetes (30%); high blood pressure (26%); and obesity (24%).

Things that make weight control difficult

- The top three barriers for controlling weight reported across all adults were; no time to exercise (19%); enjoyment of food (13%); and work commitments (9%).
- About one quarter of WA adults (24%) said nothing made it difficult for them to control their weight.

Prepared by the Chronic Disease Prevention Directorate, Public and Aboriginal Health Division

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