



## THE FACTS ABOUT OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

Overweight and obesity are serious, chronic medical conditions that are associated with a range of debilitating and life-threatening conditions. They are also among the most complex and difficult problems to treat.

Diseases and conditions associated with overweight and obesity impose huge financial burdens on health-care systems and the community. Studies have estimated that the health care costs of excess body weight in Australia today are about \$1.2 billion.

### **Fact: Being overweight or obese affects your health**

People who are overweight or obese are at increased risk of health problems, ranging from the psychological to the physical. Immediate problems include:

- low self-esteem
- social isolation
- depression
- heat intolerance
- breathlessness on exertion
- tiredness.

Other health consequences of excessive body fat include:

- type 2 diabetes
- gall bladder disease
- sleep disorders
- high blood pressure
- coronary heart disease
- stroke
- some cancers
- osteoarthritis
- back problems
- reproductive abnormalities.

### **Fact: The number of children who are overweight or obese is increasing**

The number of overweight and obese Australian children and adolescents has doubled in the last 15 years. It is estimated that between 20 and 25 percent of children and adolescents are now overweight or obese.

Because many of these people are at risk of becoming overweight or obese as adults, preventing and managing obesity in children is a priority.

In 1999-2000 almost 60 per cent of Australians – 7.5 million people – were overweight or obese.

### **Fact: Poor diet is a key risk factor for overweight and obesity**

While many factors can influence an individual's weight, overweight and obesity are mainly caused by an imbalance when energy intake from foods exceeds energy expended in physical activity.

Australia's fresh food and vegetables may be among the best in the world, yet most people don't eat enough of them.

There is growing evidence that eating the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables not only contributes to good health, but also protects against a number of diseases.

Increasing the average person's fruit and vegetable intake may be the single most important dietary change needed to reduce the risk of major diseases and is a vital part of weight management.

A National Nutrition Survey undertaken in 1995-96 collected comprehensive data from about 13,000 people on how much fruit and vegetables we eat. It collected information on people aged two years and older from both metropolitan and rural areas across Australia.

The survey found that:

- Children ate less fruit and vegetables than recommended, with around 30 per cent eating no fruit or vegetables on the day before the survey.
- Consumption of fruit by both boys and girls declined with age.
- 42 per cent of adults did not eat any fruit on the day of the survey.
- Only 17 per cent of adults had the recommended daily amount of fruit (two serves).
- 16 per cent of adults did not eat any vegetables on the day of the survey.
- About 32 per cent of adults reported eating more than 300g (four serves) of vegetables a day. This is the minimum recommended by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

The more recent 2001 National Health Survey gave similar results:

- Men and women aged 18-24 years reported the lowest levels of fruit and vegetable intake.
- Almost half of this age group reported a daily vegetable intake of three serves or less, and a fruit intake of one serve or less, which is only about half the amount recommended for good health.

Results from the two surveys also indicated that:

- Fruit intake was highest in Western Australia and South Australia and lowest in Tasmania and the Northern Territory.
- On average, people in rural and remote areas ate more vegetables than those in rural centres and metropolitan areas.
- People born in European countries other than the UK and Ireland had higher fruit intakes than those born in Australia, the UK, Ireland or East Asia.
- People who live in the most disadvantaged socioeconomic areas, who live alone (especially men), or are unemployed are more likely to have an inadequate fruit and vegetable intake.
- People living as a couple with children were most likely to have an adequate intake of fruit and vegetables.

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