# Ebbw Vale faces obesity crisis as fast food outlets outnumber healthy shops by 55 to one



Ebbw Vale, a former steel town in South Wales, has gained notoriety as the 'fattest town in the UK', a title spotlighting deep-rooted issues related to diet and health in the community. A recent investigation brought to light that 55 out of the town's 75 eating establishments are classified as fast food outlets, underscoring a concerning reliance on unhealthy dining options rather than nutritious choices. In stark contrast, Ebbw Vale boasts just one greengrocer, Fresh 'N' Fruity, highlighting a critical lack of accessible healthy food alternatives.

Prominent health influencer Callum Airey, known as Calfreezy, visited Ebbw Vale and shared his observations through a viral YouTube video. He pointed out that the current food landscape is heavily populated by chains such as Gregg's and Domino's, which thrive amidst a backdrop of rising obesity rates. According to the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID), nearly 80% of adults in the area are categorised as overweight or obese. This is alarmingly higher than the national Welsh average of 62%.

Local residents echoed these sentiments, describing how the limited availability of healthy food options fosters a dependence on fast food. One resident lamented, "Takeaways and fast food places are the only options round here." This stark reality raises grave implications for the health and well-being of the community, as studies have repeatedly shown a link between the density of fast food outlets and obesity rates. Research has illustrated that neighbourhoods with more fast food establishments often see increased obesity, particularly in regions where socioeconomic factors limit access to healthier food.

The factors contributing to Ebbw Vale's challenges extend beyond mere food choice. Public Health Wales has identified how lifestyle trends—such as increased car use and sedentary jobs—compound the situation. With the swell of home deliveries from fast food joints, some local customers reportedly make multiple orders in a single day, further entrenching unhealthy dietary habits.

The consequences of this dietary crisis are severe. Obesity is a known precursor to various health conditions, including heart disease and several types of cancer. According to Cancer Research UK, obesity is estimated to contribute to one in 20 cancer cases in Britain and incurs costs of nearly £100 billion annually to the NHS. This figure reflects the broader economic repercussions stemming from obesity, including lost earnings due to ill health.

Dietary habits in Ebbw Vale have been shaped by more than availability; they are also influenced by education and generational shifts in cooking practices. Younger generations, according to some residents, often turn to fast, convenience meals like pizzas, reflecting a disconnect from traditional cooking skills. One comment captured this trend succinctly: "McDonald's is too easy."

In 2023, health authorities expressed alarm over a significant rise in hospital admissions for vitamin deficiencies attributed to junk food diets. Hundreds of thousands of people have sought treatment for conditions such as anaemia, driven by diets lacking essential nutrients. The scale of the epidemic is underscored by NHS data showing a tenfold increase in those diagnosed with nutritional deficiencies.

This intricate web of food availability, lifestyle choices, and broader community health illustrates the pressing need for interventions in Ebbw Vale. Strategies aimed at increasing healthy food access and promoting nutritional education could empower residents to break the cycle of reliance on fast food. However, overcoming entrenched habits and improving community health will require concerted effort from local authorities, health leaders, and the residents themselves.

As Ebbw Vale grapples with these challenges, it serves as a poignant reminder of the complexities surrounding obesity and the urgent need for solutions capable of addressing both individual behaviours and systemic barriers to healthier living.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14691905/Video-UK-Ebbw-Vale-residents-obesity-YouTube-calfreezy.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/uk/ebbw-vale-the-uks-fattest-town-battling-obesity-and-fast-food-deliveries/articleshow/105020804.cms)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14691905/Video-UK-Ebbw-Vale-residents-obesity-YouTube-calfreezy.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/uk/ebbw-vale-the-uks-fattest-town-battling-obesity-and-fast-food-deliveries/articleshow/105020804.cms)
3. Paragraph 3: [[2]](https://www.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/uk/ebbw-vale-the-uks-fattest-town-battling-obesity-and-fast-food-deliveries/articleshow/105020804.cms), [[3]](https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/17269750.attempts-made-tackle-obesity-blaenau-gwent-highest-proportion-fast-food-outlets-uk/)
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6. Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14691905/Video-UK-Ebbw-Vale-residents-obesity-YouTube-calfreezy.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/uk/ebbw-vale-the-uks-fattest-town-battling-obesity-and-fast-food-deliveries/articleshow/105020804.cms), [[5]](https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12966-018-0699-8)
7. Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14691905/Video-UK-Ebbw-Vale-residents-obesity-YouTube-calfreezy.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11221287/)
8. Paragraph 8: [[2]](https://www.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/uk/ebbw-vale-the-uks-fattest-town-battling-obesity-and-fast-food-deliveries/articleshow/105020804.cms), [[7]](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9331587/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14691905/Video-UK-Ebbw-Vale-residents-obesity-YouTube-calfreezy.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/uk/ebbw-vale-the-uks-fattest-town-battling-obesity-and-fast-food-deliveries/articleshow/105020804.cms> - Ebbw Vale, located in Blaenau Gwent, Southeast Wales, has been labeled the 'fattest' town in the UK due to high obesity rates. Investigations revealed that 73% of the town's eateries are fast food outlets, with 55 out of 75 restaurants offering such options. Some takeaway establishments report customers ordering home deliveries multiple times a day, indicating a growing reliance on fast food. This trend contributes to the town's obesity crisis, with 80% of the population being overweight or obese, compared to the Welsh national average of 62%. Public Health Wales attributes this surge to factors like increased car usage, sedentary jobs, and a preference for high-fat, high-sugar foods prepared outside the home.
3. <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/17269750.attempts-made-tackle-obesity-blaenau-gwent-highest-proportion-fast-food-outlets-uk/> - Blaenau Gwent, encompassing Ebbw Vale, has the highest proportion of fast food outlets in the UK, with 73% of food establishments offering fast food. This prevalence raises concerns about the health and well-being of the community. Efforts are being made to address obesity in the area, but the dominance of fast food outlets presents a significant challenge.
4. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19149426/> - A study examining the relationship between neighborhood fast-food outlet density and obesity among older adults found that increased density was associated with unhealthy lifestyles and a higher risk of obesity. Residents in neighborhoods with a high density of fast-food outlets had significantly higher odds of being obese compared to those in areas with low density. The study highlights the impact of the built environment on dietary behaviors and health outcomes.
5. <https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12966-018-0699-8> - Research involving 51,361 UK Biobank participants examined the interaction between fast-food outlet exposure and income on diet and obesity. The study found that a higher proportion of fast-food outlets in neighborhoods was positively associated with greater BMI, higher odds of obesity, and increased consumption of processed meats. The findings suggest that the density of fast-food outlets contributes to dietary habits and obesity risk, particularly in lower socioeconomic areas.
6. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11221287/> - A systematic review and meta-analysis investigated the association between the retail food environment and obesity. The study found that proximity to fast-food outlets was linked to a higher risk of obesity, while proximity to supermarkets and fresh fruit and vegetable stores was associated with a lower risk. The availability and accessibility of different types of food outlets significantly influence dietary choices and health outcomes.
7. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9331587/> - A study examining the relationship between the presence of fast-food outlets and BMI found that individuals living in low socioeconomic status neighborhoods with at least two fast-food outlets within 1 km of their residential address had a higher BMI than those with no fast-food outlets within the same radius. The study emphasizes the role of fast-food outlets in health inequalities and suggests that the presence of healthy food outlets does not buffer this association.