# Obesity rates among teenagers in England soar by 50 per cent since 2008



The prevalence of obesity and overweight conditions among teenagers in England has experienced a striking increase, soaring by 50 per cent since 2008, according to recent research findings. This surge is attributed to significant lifestyle changes and dietary habits, particularly influenced by the consumption of ultra-processed foods and sedentary behaviours linked to excessive screen time.

The research, which utilised Body Mass Index (BMI) data from adolescents aged 12 to 17, indicated that there was a 22 per cent increase in the rates of obesity and overweight status between 2008 and 2010. Furthermore, these rates escalated by an alarming 33 per cent from 2021 to 2023, indicating a notable acceleration in figures following the Covid pandemic.

Based at universities and hospitals in Bristol and Liverpool, the study authors highlighted a range of factors contributing to this trend. They suggested that the combined effects of increased consumption of highly processed foods, sedentary lifestyles exacerbated by screen time, inadequate sleep, and rising mental health challenges have significantly impacted adolescent health. “Over the past 15 years, obesity in adolescents has risen significantly due to a combination of increased consumption of ultra-processed foods, sedentary lifestyles driven by excessive screen time, inadequate sleep, and rising mental health challenges,” the authors stated.

Additionally, socioeconomic disparities have further compounded the issue, creating environments that foster unhealthy lifestyle choices. The research indicated that overall obesity levels in the UK are substantially higher than in many other European nations, with 64 per cent of the population over the age of 15 classified as obese or overweight. In contrast, this figure stands at 46 per cent in Italy and 45 per cent in France, as per data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Follow-up observations over a six-year period highlighted that the risks of developing various health problems were significantly elevated in obese young individuals compared to their peers with healthy weight. The study found that the risk of developing sleep apnoea was eight times greater for those classified as obese, with the risk for type 2 diabetes being eleven times higher, and four times higher for polycystic ovary syndrome. Furthermore, the risk of developing liver disease was reported to be twelve times greater for obese teenagers.

Nutritionist Rob Hobson, author of *Unprocess Your Family Life*, commented on the findings, stating that the increase in the number of obese teenagers “rings alarm bells”. Although he was not involved in the study, Hobson noted the significant role that ultra-processed foods play in children's diets, citing their addictive nature and convenience. “Packaged snacks, fizzy drinks, sugary cereals, takeaways, and cheap ready meals, they are everywhere. They are hard to resist, they are addictive, often cheap and convenient,” he explained.

He further elaborated on the context of these dietary choices by linking them to high rates of anxiety, poor sleep, and a generally sedentary lifestyle, which can influence young people's food decisions. Hobson suggested that there is a need for better education regarding food choices and preparing meals, advocating an understanding of health implications linked to diet.

The research, led by Dr Dinesh Giri and Dr Senthil Senniappan, both noted in the field of paediatric endocrinology, is scheduled for presentation next month at the European Congress on Obesity, which will take place in Malaga, Spain.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/238436/ultra-processed-foods-make-almost-two-thirds-britains/> - This article supports the claim that ultra-processed foods are a significant component of children's diets in the UK, contributing to poor health outcomes.
2. <https://www.mrc-epid.cam.ac.uk/blog/2024/07/19/uk-teenagers-two-thirds-calories-upf-conversation/> - The article highlights that UK teenagers derive a large portion of their calories from ultra-processed foods, which is linked to adverse health effects.
3. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8137628/> - This study demonstrates the association between ultra-processed food consumption and increased risk of obesity in the UK adult population, which can inform similar trends in adolescents.
4. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight> - Although not a specific article, WHO reports on global obesity trends often highlight lifestyle factors such as diet and physical activity, which align with the causes mentioned in the article.
5. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/obesity-update-2017_9789264276465-en> - This OECD report provides data on obesity rates across different countries, which supports the comparison between the UK and other European nations like Italy and France.
6. <https://www.dhsc.gov.uk/publications/national-child-measurement-programme-results-2022-to-2023/> - This report from the UK's Department of Health and Social Care provides data on child obesity trends, though specific figures may vary depending on the source.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/overweight-teens-england-increased-b2731608.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data