# England’s obesity crisis deepens as nearly two-thirds of adults become overweight



# Obesity Crisis in England: A Growing Tide of Concern

England’s obesity crisis remains a pressing issue, with alarming statistics highlighting the troubling trend of rising overweight and obesity rates among adults. Recent figures reveal that nearly two-thirds of the adult population are classified as overweight, with an additional 260,000 people falling into this category last year alone. The situation is compounded by the fact that over 14 million individuals, equivalent to 26.5 percent of adults, are classified as obese.

Local statistics paint an even grimmer picture, particularly in areas across the Midlands and North East, where obesity rates have reached concerning heights. West Lindsey in Lincolnshire tops the charts with 38.8 percent of its population classified as obese, followed closely by Hartlepool and Bolsover, both at 37.9 percent. Understandably, the obesity crisis carries serious implications for public health, costing the NHS an estimated £11 billion annually, in addition to substantial economic losses due to decreased productivity and increased benefits claims.

The new data, released by the Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, underscores a broader dietary concern, revealing that less than a third of adults consume the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables daily. Additionally, one-third of the population does not engage in any regular physical activity. Adults aged 55 to 64 represent the highest demographic of unhealthy weight, with astonishing figures showing that nearly three-quarters are overweight and one-third fall into the obese category.

Despite the recent slight improvement in physical activity levels—67.4 percent of adults were active last year, a marginal increase from 67.1 percent the previous year—the overall outlook is disheartening. Only 31.3 percent of adults are achieving the fruit and vegetable intake deemed essential for a balanced diet.

Katharine Jenner, director of the Obesity Health Alliance, emphasises the need for government intervention, advocating for measures to confront a "broken food system." Speaking out on the inadequacy of previous governmental responses, she stresses that effective public health strategies must include a ban on junk food advertising and promotions. "It’s no surprise that obesity rates are continuing to rise," she remarked, urging the current government to seize the opportunity to make impactful changes that prioritise health over complacency.

In response to these mounting concerns, the Department of Health has announced upcoming restrictions on junk food advertising, set to take effect in October. A spokesperson highlighted the government's commitment to tackling the obesity crisis, stating that existing measures have already led to improved outcomes, such as a projected reduction of 20,000 obesity cases alongside economic benefits worth £2 billion.

However, even with initiatives like calorie labelling and the Soft Drinks Industry Levy, criticism remains regarding the lack of comprehensive action. The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) argues that obesity should not only be seen as a personal failure but rather as a systemic issue connected to environmental and economic conditions. The think tank estimates the financial burden of obesity on the economy to be a staggering £98 billion annually, advocating for more robust measures such as increased taxes and comprehensive public health strategies aimed at fostering healthier lifestyles.

Additionally, a recent report from the House of Lords raised alarms about government indecisiveness regarding dietary interventions. It has been suggested that longstanding conflicts of interest between government officials and the food industry have stymied decisive action. The committee is calling for a strategic long-term plan aiming to overhaul an ineffective food system, including rigorous oversight of food advertising and tax measures that could dissuade consumption of unhealthy products.

As childhood obesity rates remain a particularly disconcerting facet of this crisis, interventions targeting younger populations are being explored. Initiatives like the Chefs in Schools programme at Mandeville Primary School aim to provide healthier meal options to students, combating the detrimental effects of cheap, available junk food, especially in lower-income households.

In summary, the scale of England’s obesity crisis prompts urgent attention. While the government has taken steps in the right direction, experts contend that more profound, systemic changes are essential to reverse the trends and foster a healthier society. As Professor Sir Stephen Powis from the NHS succinctly put it, "Obesity remains one of the biggest public health issues we face as a society." The time for decisive action is now.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14687899/England-grip-obesity-crisis-two-thirds-adults-dangerously-overweight-admit-not-eating-recommended-5-day.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/d6f2354b-8fd4-434b-bbb2-f5828f9ecc42)
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14687899/England-grip-obesity-crisis-two-thirds-adults-dangerously-overweight-admit-not-eating-recommended-5-day.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/d6f2354b-8fd4-434b-bbb2-f5828f9ecc42> - The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has warned of the impact of obesity on economic inactivity and low productivity in the UK. Obesity affects one in four adults in the UK, the third-highest rate in the OECD, and costs the economy an estimated £98 billion annually. The think-tank argues that obesity should not be considered solely an individual issue but rather linked to working conditions, the built environment, and the food system. IPPR's research shows that areas with higher obesity rates also experience higher economic inactivity, often correlating with poverty. The government, recognizing the link between obesity and public health costs (about £6.5 billion annually to the NHS), has introduced measures like calorie labeling and restrictions on unhealthy food placements in supermarkets, as well as the Soft Drinks Industry Levy. However, the IPPR calls for more significant interventions, including increased taxes and regulations on ultra-processed food and increased investment in public health to promote healthier lifestyles and enhance economic productivity.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/e2168d2b-2282-4eac-84c2-6f9187456b21> - La continua alarma sobre el intervencionismo estatal ha provocado que los gobiernos no aborden adecuadamente las dietas poco saludables ni regulen correctamente a las compañías de alimentos, lo que ha desencadenado una 'emergencia de salud pública' relacionada con la obesidad, advirtió un comité de la Cámara de los Lores. Los pares instaron al gobierno a desarrollar un plan a largo plazo para solucionar el sistema alimentario 'roto' y garantizar que la industria asuma los costos. Pese a implementar numerosas políticas desde 1992, los niveles de obesidad en Inglaterra han seguido aumentando. Esto se debe en parte a un 'claro conflicto de intereses' entre ministros e industria durante el desarrollo de políticas. El comité recomendó que el gobierno obligue a las empresas de alimentos a informar sobre sus ingresos provenientes de alimentos altos en grasa, sal y azúcar, e introduzca impuestos sobre estos componentes. Aunque estas medidas aumentarían el costo de los alimentos no saludables, también disuadirían su consumo y promoverían dietas más saludables. Se subrayó que la industria no debe aumentar los precios de los alimentos saludables para recuperar los costos de los impuestos.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/b5035c40-a6ed-4a88-8b8e-1e245f1473e9> - The junk food crisis in the UK has led to alarming rates of child obesity, with one in five children classified as obese by Year 6. Initiatives like the Chefs in Schools programme at Mandeville Primary School aim to combat this by providing nutritious meals, improving students' health and academic performance. Rising healthy food prices and cheap, accessible junk food contribute to the problem, especially among low-income families. Government measures like sugar taxes, advertising restrictions, and universal free school meals are being proposed and implemented to address this public health crisis. Campaigners emphasize the need for stronger policies, higher food standards, and better enforcement to ensure children receive nutritious meals, particularly in deprived areas disproportionately affected by the junk food influx.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/uk-pharmacies-regulator-tightens-rules-prescribing-obesity-drugs-2025-02-04/> - The UK's General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) has tightened regulations for online pharmacies prescribing obesity drugs to prevent potential harm to patients. The GPhC updated its guidance for the first time in three years due to concerns about the dispensing of weight-loss medications. It has added the GLP-1 receptor agonist drug class, including Wegovy and Mounjaro, to its high-risk medicines list, requiring stricter measures for prescribing. Online pharmacies must now independently verify a patient's weight, height, and body mass index before prescribing weight-loss drugs, and online questionnaires or phone calls will no longer suffice. The stricter guidelines come in response to a surge in the private market for obesity drugs in the UK, with an estimated 500,000 people using them, often with concerning dispensing practices. The GPhC has taken enforcement action against several online pharmacies for their handling of weight-loss medications.
6. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmenvfru/37/report.html> - The volume price promotion restrictions are expected to accrue health benefits of over £2 billion and provide NHS savings of £180m over a 25-year period. The Government welcomes the actions taken by some retailers who voluntarily limiting the promotion of less healthy products before the new regulations come into force. Furthermore, the location restrictions on the placement of less healthy products in key selling locations came into force on 1 October 2022. The location restrictions are the single most impactful policy at reducing children’s calorie intakes. The location restrictions are expected to accrue health benefits of over £57 billion and NHS savings of over £4 billion, over the next 25 years. With the implementation of the location restrictions in 2022, 96% of the expected health benefits of the promotions policy have begun to accrue. Calorie labelling in large restaurants, cafes and takeaways have also been in force since April 2022. Further restrictions on the advertising of less healthy products before 9pm on TV and paid-for advertising online will come into force from October 2025. The volume price promotion restrictions are designed to target volume price deals such as ‘buy-one-get-one-free’ and ‘3 for 2’, where consumers are incentivised to purchase more than they originally intended. Studies show that volume price promotions encourage the over purchasing of less healthy products and result in a greater sales uplift in comparison to simple price reductions. Meal deals are excluded from the volume price promotion restrictions because they are targeted at adults who tend to consume all of the products during the same eating occasion rather than stockpile at home. Meal deals also aim to reduce the cost of a single meal rather than incentivise additional purchases.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sugary_drink_tax> - In the 2016 United Kingdom budget, the UK Government announced the introduction of a sugar tax, officially named the 'Soft Drinks Industry Levy'. The tax came into effect on 6 April 2018. Beverage manufacturers are taxed according to the volume of sugar-sweetened beverages they produce or import. The tax is imposed at the point of production or importation, in two bands. Drinks with total sugar content above 5g per 100 millilitres are taxed at 18p per litre and drinks above 8g per 100 millilitres at 24p per litre. The measure was estimated to generate an additional £1 billion a year in tax revenue which would be spent on funding for sport in UK schools. The tax raised £336m in 2019-2020. Despite not being part of the United Kingdom the British Soft Drinks Industry Levy came into force on the Isle of Man on 1 April 2019 because of the Common Purse Agreement. It was proposed that pure fruit juices, milk-based drinks and the smallest producers would not be taxed.