OBESITY: An underestimated threat
Public perceptions of obesity in Europe

COUNTRY SUMMARY

FINLAND

Conducted by independent strategic insight agency Opinium, in collaboration with the European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO) and with the support of Medtronic

Topline Report:

Views on personal weight

- Just over half (54%) of respondents consider their current weight to be a normal / healthy, whilst nearly two in five (38%) would describe themselves to be overweight. Only 4% say that they consider themselves to be obese

- Some respondents under-estimate their weight category
  - A quarter (26%) of those that consider themselves to be a ‘normal / healthy’ weight, are in fact overweight (based on a BMI calculated from their self-reported height and weight)
  - Those who consider themselves overweight are also likely to underestimate their actual weight category – 49% of those that consider themselves overweight are in fact obese

- Two in five respondents (41%) are happy with their current weight, whilst just under a third say they are unhappy with it (32%)
  - Happiness with one’s weight is much lower amongst those that consider themselves to be overweight or obese (11% and 1% respectively)
Weight demographics\(^1\) amongst respondents in Finland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weight distribution based on respondent BMIs(^2)</th>
<th>Adult men</th>
<th>Adult women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underweight</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy weight</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overweight</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obese</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Based on BMIs calculated from individuals’ self-reported height and weight, 24% of respondents are obese, with a further 33% categorised as overweight
  - Women are much more likely to be a healthy weight than men (46% vs 37% respectively). Two in five (38%) male respondents were overweight compared to over a quarter of women (29%). However, differences in obesity between genders is less pronounced – 24% of men versus 23% of women.
  - The proportion of overweight and obese respondents also increases with age (39% of those aged 18-34 compared to 63% of those aged 55+)

Views on weight in Finland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average estimated weight distribution for…(^2)</th>
<th>Adult men</th>
<th>Adult women</th>
<th>Children (Under 18)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underweight</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy weight</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overweight</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obese</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The average estimate for the proportion of Finnish population groups that are obese are: 17% of Finnish men, 16% of Finnish women, and 11% of children (under 18%)

- A high proportion (86%) of respondents indicate that they personally know someone that they would consider obese

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\(^1\) Respondents were asked to provide their height (in metres) and weight (in kilograms), from this BMIs were calculated.

\(^2\) Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Opinium Research carried out an online survey of 2,005 Finnish adults aged 18+ from 9\(^{th}\) to 19\(^{th}\) of February 2015. Results have been weighted to nationally representative criteria on age and gender.

[www.opinium.co.uk](http://www.opinium.co.uk)
The causes & effects of obesity

Causes of obesity

- A high percentage of respondents (93%) believe obesity is ‘caused by lifestyle choices’. Almost two in five (38%) agree that ‘obesity is a disease’, with a similar proportion believing it ‘is a genetic disorder’ (38%)
  - Women were more likely than men to agree that it is ‘a disease’ (42% versus 34% respectively)
- Of the lifestyle and environmental factors tested, ‘poor diet’ and ‘lack of physical activity’ stand out as the factors that the most people think are causes of ‘obesity’ – 95% and 94% selected these as causes of obesity
- Just over half (54%) identify stress as a cause of obesity, whilst 46% consider lack of sleep as a contributing factor
  - Women are more likely than men to identify stress (63% vs 45%) and lack of sleep (55% vs 37%) as causes of obesity
  - Similarly, younger respondents (aged 18 – 34) are more likely than their older counterparts (aged 55+) to identify stress (65% vs 44%) and lack of sleep (56% vs 37%) as causes
- Two thirds (67%) consider a ‘poor diet’ to be the main contributing lifestyle / environmental factor to an individual developing obesity

Effects of obesity

- A higher proportion of respondents feel smoking poses the greater danger to one’s health compared to obesity – 60% think smoking, 40% think obesity
- The health threats that the most people associate with obesity are: diabetes (84%), joint and back pain (83%), high blood pressure (83%), heart disease (79%) and low confidence and self-esteem (74%)
- However, over two-thirds of respondents also associate obesity with sleep apnoea (71%), tiredness (68%), and depression (58%)
- Whilst only just over one in ten (14%) think cancer is caused by obesity
- Just over half (51%) of respondents consider heart disease to be amongst the biggest obesity related threats to health, wellbeing and lifestyle. This is followed by diabetes (47%) and high blood pressure (27%)
- On average, respondents estimate that obesity typically shortens an individual’s life expectancy by 11 years, with 54% thinking it would shorten one’s life by ten years or less
  - Those that consider themselves obese estimate a decrease in life expectancy of 9 years on average, with 64% estimating a decrease of 10 years or less

Treating obesity

- Half of respondents (49%) consider obesity to be something that can be treated by a GP rather than something that can be treated by a specialist (37%)

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3 Life expectancy figures exclude those that stated that they ‘don’t know’
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• Most respondents agree that diet control (97%) and exercise (94%) are appropriate treatments for obesity either ‘every time’ or ‘almost every time’.

• Almost two-thirds (65%) consider surgery as an appropriate treatment ‘occasionally / sometimes’ with a further 10% thinking it is appropriate ‘almost every time’ or ‘every time’

• Respondents are divided over what is the most effective means to treat morbid obesity. A third think ‘diet control’ (49%) and almost a third think ‘surgery’ (31%). Only 11% think ‘exercise’ is the most effective treatment method and a mere 3% think ‘medication’
  o Women are more likely than men to consider ‘surgery’ to be the most effective treatment method (34% versus 28%)

Views on surgery

• Most respondents (97%) are aware of bariatric surgery (either very, moderately or slightly aware)
  o Awareness is only slightly higher amongst women (98%) than men (95%)

• Just under a quarter (22%) of those aware of bariatric surgery have a friend / relative who has had bariatric surgery. With only 1% indicating that they themselves have had the surgery

• Just over a third (34%) of respondents who have not had bariatric surgery indicate that they would consider bariatric surgery if they were obese

• Just over a third (34%) agree that the country’s national health service should be required to fund bariatric surgery for those who are obese
  o The likelihood to agree that the country’s national health service should fund such surgery is higher for those that consider themselves obese (59%) than those who think they are a healthy weight (26%) and amongst women (36%) than men (31%)
  o Older respondents (55+) are also more likely to think the national health service should fund surgery than younger respondents (18 to 34) – 39% and 23% respectively

• Similar numbers (39%) agree that an individual’s health insurer should be required to fund such surgery

• Over half (59%) agree that the individual concerned should be required to fund the surgery
  o The likelihood to agree that the individual concerned should fund such surgery is lower for those that consider themselves obese (32%) than those who think they are a healthy weight (66%)

• Almost two-thirds (64%) indicate that they would be likely to consider surgical intervention if they were to develop diabetes and they knew the surgery would cure it