

Fast Facts: Gender and Obesity

This fact sheet is one in a series of 'Fast Facts' that provide information to help shed light on the complex health issue of obesity.

Living with Obesity and Gender¹

- Many studies have shown that men and women experience living with and being treated for obesity very differently.
 - Women tend to report worsening quality of life as obesity increases, with Caucasian women reporting the largest effects.
 - Women report significantly higher impairment of self-esteem with obesity, even when compared within racial groups.
 - Men were most likely to report the most impairment in physical function.
- Physicians tend to treat overweight and obesity differently in men and women.²
 - Physicians are more likely to recommend weight loss to women in the overweight category (BMI 25 - 30) than to men of equal height and weight.
 - Physicians are less likely to recommend weight loss to women in the obese category (BMI >30) than to men of equal height and weight.
- In a study of stigma, women were less likely to have a negative response to obese peers than men. Of the groups studied, African-American women were the least likely to have a negative response to obese peers.³

Historic Trends

- The prevalence of obesity showed little change from 1960-1980. However, this was followed by an increase of almost 8 percentage points between 1976-1994, with a similar increase between 1988-2000.⁴
 - During this time of rapid growth in obesity, average BMI increased more rapidly in women than in men.⁵
- Over the period 1999-2008, however, there were smaller changes in the prevalence among men than seen previously and no significant change in prevalence among women.⁶

About the STOP Obesity Alliance

The Strategies to Overcome and Prevent (STOP) Obesity Alliance is a collaboration of nearly 70 consumer, provider, government, labor, business, health insurer and quality-of-care organizations working to drive innovative and practical strategies that combat obesity. Housed at The George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services, Department of Health Policy, the Alliance has centered on developing reports, policy recommendations, and tools for consumers and policy makers that are evidence-based and approved by consensus. The Alliance receives funding from founding sponsor, Sanofi. For more information, visit www.stopobesityalliance.org and follow the Alliance on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

The Current State of Obesity and Gender

- In 2009-2010, the prevalence of obesity was **35.5% among adult men and 35.8% among adult women.**⁷
- Regardless of race, women have a **higher risk** of obesity and overweight than men.⁸
- In 2004 wages were **\$8,666 less for females with obesity and \$4,772 less for males with obesity**⁹
- In 2008, obese women experienced a **14.6% wage penalty** (\$5,826) compared to normal weight women⁹

Resources

¹ White, M.A., et al. (2004) Gender, Race, and Obesity-Related Quality of Life at Extreme Levels of Obesity. *Obesity*. 12: 949-955.

² Anderson, C., et al. (April 2001) Weight Loss and Gender: An Examination of Physician Attitudes. *Obesity*. 9: 257-263.

³ Jain, A., et al. (November 2, 2007) Re-Visioning Success: How Stigma, Perceptions of Treatment, and Definitions of Success Impact Obesity and Weight Management in America. *Strategies to Overcome and Prevent (STOP) Obesity Alliance*. Available at: http://www.stopobesityalliance.org/wp-content/assets/2009/06/report_re-visioning_success.pdf

⁴ Flegal KM, Carroll MD, Kuczmarski RJ, Johnson CL. Overweight and obesity in the United States: prevalence and trends, 1960-1994. *Int J Obes Relat Metab Disord*. 1998;22(1):39-47, and Flegal KM, Carroll MD, Ogden CL, Johnson CL. Prevalence and trends in obesity among US adults, 1999-2000. *JAMA*. 2002;288(14):1723-1727, and Flegal KM, Carroll MD, Ogden CL, Curtin LR. Prevalence and trends in obesity among US adults, 1999-2008. *JAMA*. 2010;303(3):235-241 Found in Flegal KM, Carroll MD, Kit BK, Ogden CL. Prevalence of obesity and trends in the distribution of body mass index among US adults, 1999-2010. *JAMA* 2012;307(5):491-497.

⁵ Wang, Y. & M. A. Beydoun. (2007) The Obesity Epidemic in the United States—Gender, Age, Socioeconomic, Racial/Ethnic, and Geographic Characteristics: A Systematic Review and Meta-Regression Analysis. *Epidemiologic Reviews*. 1: 6-28.

⁶ Flegal 2012.

⁷ Flegal KM, Carroll MD, Kit BK, Ogden CL. Prevalence of obesity and trends in the distribution of body mass index among US adults, 1999-2010. *JAMA* 2012;307(5):491-497. Available at: <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1104933>.

⁸ Borders, T. F., et al. (2006) Gender-Specific Disparities in Obesity. *Journal of Community Health*. 31: 57-68.

⁹ Dor, A., Ferguson, C., Tan, E., Dive, L., and Palmer, J. (2011). Gender and Race Gaps Attributable to Obesity. *The George Washington University Department of Health Policy*. Available at: http://sphhs.gwu.edu/departments/healthpolicy/dhp_publications/pub_uploads/dhpPublication_FA85CB82-5056-9D20-3DBD361E605324F2.pdf.