

# **OBESITY: An underestimated threat**

## **Public perceptions of obesity in Europe**

### **COUNTRY SUMMARY**

#### **FRANCE**

**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**

- Over half (58%) of respondents consider their current weight to be a normal / healthy, whilst a third (34%) would describe themselves to be overweight. Only 4% indicated that they consider their current weight obese
- Some respondents under-estimate their weight category.
  - 16% 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)
  - Similarly, over a quarter (28%) of those that consider themselves overweight are in fact obese – again based on a BMI calculated from their self-reported height and weight
- Almost half of respondents (48%) are happy with their current weight, whilst a third say they are unhappy with it (33%)
  - Happiness with one's weight is much lower amongst those that consider themselves to be overweight or obese (10% and 0% respectively)
  - It is also higher amongst men than women (53% and 43% respectively)

## Weight demographics<sup>1</sup> amongst respondents in France

Weight distribution based on respondent BMIs <sup>2</sup>	Adult men	Adult women
Underweight	2%	6%
Healthy weight	46%	57%
Overweight	38%	23%
Obese	14%	14%

- Based on BMIs calculated from individuals' self-reported height and weight, 14% of respondents are obese, with a further 30% categorised as overweight
  - Although the proportion of obese individuals is consistent between men and women (at 14%), more male participants (38%) than female participants (23%) are overweight
  - The proportion of overweight and obese respondents also increases with age (31% of those aged 18-34 compared to 54% of those aged 55+)
  - By region, weight issues (overweight and obesity) are more common in respondents based in the North (55%) and East (52%) of France than other regions – South West (44%), South (42%), West (41%), Île-de-France (38%).

## Views on weight in France

Average estimated weight distribution for... <sup>2</sup>	Adult men	Adult women	Children (Under 18)
Underweight	12%	16%	12%
Healthy weight	46%	42%	51%
Overweight	26%	25%	22%
Obese	16%	16%	14%

- The average estimate for the proportion of French population groups that are obese are: 16% of French men, 16% of French women, and 14% of Children (under 18)
- Over half (55%) of respondents indicate that they personally know someone that they would consider obese

<sup>1</sup> Respondents were asked to provide their height (in metres) and weight (in kilograms), from this BMIs were calculated

<sup>2</sup> Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Opinium Research carried out an online survey of 2,000 French adults aged 18+ from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> of December 2014. Results have been weighted to nationally representative criteria on age and gender.

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## The causes & effects of obesity

### Causes of obesity

- Almost three quarters of respondents (74%) agree that 'obesity is caused by lifestyle choices' and almost two thirds (65%) agree that it 'is a disease'. Two in every five respondents agree that it 'is a genetic disorder' (43%) or a 'psychological disorder' (40%)
  - Men are more likely to agree that 'obesity is caused by lifestyle choices' (78%) than women (71%), and less likely than women to agree that 'it is a disease' (61% vs 69% 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' – 93% and 88% selected these as causes of obesity
- Over half of the respondents (55%) identify stress as a cause of obesity, whilst only 19% consider lack of sleep as a contributing factor
  - Women are more likely than men to identify stress (60% vs 49%) and lack of sleep (22% vs 16%) as causes of obesity
  - Similarly, younger respondents (aged 18 – 34) are more likely than their older counterparts (aged 55+) to identify stress (59% vs 50%) and lack of sleep (24% vs 13%) as causes
- Almost three quarters (72%) consider a 'poor diet' to be the main contributing lifestyle / environmental factor to an individual developing obesity

### Effects of obesity

- Respondents are more likely to think smoking poses a greater danger to one's health than obesity (61%) than vice versa (39%)
  - Men are particularly likely to consider smoking to be a greater danger to an individual's health than obesity (65%), as are those aged 55+ (63%)
  - The only group that is more likely to consider obesity a greater danger than smoking are those that actually consider themselves to be obese (52%)
- The health threats that the most people associate with obesity are: heart disease (79%), joint and back pain (72%), low confidence and self-esteem (71%), diabetes (67%), tiredness (66%) and high blood pressure (64%)
- Whilst only 16% think cancer is caused by obesity
- Over half (56%) of respondents consider heart disease to be amongst the biggest obesity related threat to health, wellbeing and lifestyle. This is followed by diabetes (27%) and joint and back pain (23%)
- On average, respondents estimate that obesity typically shortens an individual's life expectancy by 11 years, with 52% thinking it would shorten one's life by ten years or less<sup>3</sup>
  - Those that consider themselves obese estimate a decrease in life expectancy of nine years on average, with 68% estimating a decrease of 10 years or less
  - Older respondents (aged 55+) and are also amongst the most likely to think obesity shortens an individual's life by 10 years or less (55%)

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<sup>3</sup> Life expectancy figures exclude those that stated that they 'don't know'  
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## Treating obesity

- Three quarters (75%) consider obesity to be something that requires the attention of a specialist rather than something that can be treated by a GP (16%)
  - Women are more likely than men to think obesity requires specialist treatment (81% vs 70% respectively).
- Most respondents agree that diet control (89%) and exercise (85%) are appropriate treatments for obesity either 'every time' or 'almost every time'
- Almost two thirds (63%) consider surgery as an appropriate treatment 'occasionally / sometimes' with a further 18% thinking it is appropriate 'almost every time' or every time'. The equivalent figures for the use of medication are 45% and 21%
- Diet control (36%) and surgery (34%) are considered the most effective means to treat morbid obesity. Exercise is considered the most effective treatment method by 15% and medication by just 4%

## Views on surgery

- Most respondents (79%) are aware of bariatric surgery (either very, moderately or slightly)
  - Awareness is higher amongst women (84%) than men (74%)
- Just under a quarter (24%) of those aware of bariatric surgery have a friend / relative who has had bariatric surgery. With only 2% indicating that they themselves have had the surgery
- A third (35%) of respondents who have not had bariatric surgery indicate that they would consider bariatric surgery if they were obese
  - Men were less likely to say they would consider bariatric surgery (32%) than women (37%)
- Over half (58%) agree that the country's National Health Service should be required to fund bariatric surgery for those who are obese.
  - The likelihood to agree that the National Health Service should fund such surgery is higher amongst women (60%) and those that consider themselves obese (75%).
- Almost three quarter (73%) agree that an individuals' health insurer should be required to fund such surgery
  - The likelihood to agree that health insurers should fund such surgery is higher amongst women (77%) than men (69%)
- Just under half (47%) agree that the individual concerned should be required to fund the surgery)
  - The likelihood to agree that the individual concerned should fund such surgery is lower for women than men (44% vs 51% respectively) and lower for those that consider themselves obese (42%) than those who think they are a healthy weight (49%)
- Three in five (61%) indicate that they would be likely to consider surgical intervention if they were to develop diabetes and they knew the surgery would cure it