

## PRESS RELEASE

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### Obesity threat: Many Europeans unaware of the health implications

*Despite the concerns about the rising threat of obesity, many Europeans are still unaware of the dangers it poses.*

According to a major public perception survey, conducted among more than 14,000 people in seven countries, nearly a quarter of Europeans don't realise that obesity can cause heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. Less than half recognise a link with strokes and only 16% are aware of the connection with cancer.

The survey is one of the most extensive obesity perception studies yet developed. It was conducted in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom by the independent strategic insight agency Opinium, in collaboration with the European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO) and with the support of global healthcare company Medtronic.

"Obesity is one of the fastest growing threats to the health and wellbeing of our society," said Euan Woodward, Executive Director of EASO. In some European countries as many as six out of ten adults are now classified as overweight or obese and by 2030 it is predicted that this could rise to as high as nine out of ten<sup>1</sup>. "And yet, this survey shows that many people still appear to have little understanding of the consequences," he said.

The survey showed that many people also have a lack of understanding of their own weight. Four out of five who have a weight and height ratio that classifies them as 'obese' described themselves as simply 'overweight' and a third of those who were 'overweight' thought that their weight was 'normal'.

Although less than half of all respondents (45%) are happy with their weight, one in five takes no action whatsoever to control it and only 17% monitor the calories they eat.

Most respondents recognised poor diet and lack of exercise as factors causing obesity, but less than a quarter knew that a lack of sleep can be a contributor, and under half knew that stress could also play a significant role.

"Governments, policymakers and health authorities should be greatly concerned by the findings of this survey," said Mr Woodward. "It confirms that much greater effort is needed to educate people about the implications."

A survey conducted by EASO last year highlighted a similar need to raise awareness among policymakers, particularly about the impact that obesity prevention and management programmes could have to reduce the many secondary diseases that are becoming an increasing burden for already overstretched health services.

EASO points out that research has shown that nine out of ten people with type 2 diabetes, for example, no longer require often-costly medication two years after undergoing obesity surgery.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Webber L, Divajeval D, Marsh T, et al. The European obese model: the shape of things to come. European Society of Cardiology, May 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Ikramuddin, S. Roux-en-Y Gastric Bypass vs Intensive Medical Management for the control of type 2 diabetes, hypertension and hyperlipidemia: The Diabetes Surgery study Randomized clinical trial. JAMA 2013.

“It is clear that the vast majority of people regard obesity as a problem purely of personal lifestyle, rather than recognising that there are other underlying issues which society needs to address,” said Mr Woodward.

He says that overweight and obese individuals should have access to appropriate care to help them manage their weight and prevent later complications. “There is an urgent need for better education to improve understanding and to inform overweight or obese people about the support and, if appropriate, treatments that can help them avoid the many secondary conditions like heart disease,” he said.

“Major policy change is needed and a first step must be improving awareness of the challenge faced.”

The survey has been published to coincide with European Obesity Day, which is on May 16<sup>th</sup>. A report on the survey and more detailed findings by country can be downloaded from the EASO website: <http://easo.org/perception-survey>.

**For further information please contact:**

**Euan Woodward**

Executive Director, European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO)

Tel: +44 (0) 20 3751 7967

**About the European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO)**

The European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO) ([www.easo.org](http://www.easo.org)) is the leading European scientific and practice-based professional membership association in its field, with networks in over 30 countries. EASO facilitates and engages in actions that prevent and combat the epidemic of obesity. It contributes to high-level European and national scientific consultations and coordinates obesity education across Europe.

**About Opinium Research LLP**

Opinium Research is a strategic insight agency that works with organisations across multiple geographies, using a wide variety of research methodologies to provide social insights and findings to help policy decision-making.

**About Medtronic**

Medtronic plc ([www.medtronic.com](http://www.medtronic.com)), headquartered in Dublin, Ireland, is the global leader in medical technology – alleviating pain, restoring health, and extending life for millions of people around the world.

### **A selection of some of the results by country**

- The proportion of people considering themselves either overweight or obese is higher in Italy (45%) and the UK (44%) and lower in Germany (36%) and France (38%).
- Happiness with personal weight is highest in Germany (55%) and lowest in Denmark (40%), the UK (41%) and Italy (41%). It is also higher among men (49%) than women (42%).
- People in Denmark (80%) and Italy (75%) are most likely to know someone who is obese. They are least likely in France (55%).
- More people in the UK (94%) and Denmark (84%) say that obesity is caused by lifestyle choices.
- More people in France (43%) consider obesity to be a genetic disorder. In the UK this is believed by only 25%.
- Only in the UK was obesity recognised by most people as a greater threat to health than smoking. This was recognised by 51% compared to 39% in France.
- More people in France recognise stress as a contributing factor (55%) than in the UK (38%).
- More people in France (81%) and Belgium (79%) think that surgery is sometimes an appropriate treatment for obesity than in the UK (63%). However, the UK has the highest awareness of obesity surgery (87%) as a treatment.

**For more detailed statistics please refer to the survey results “Obesity: An underestimated threat” on <http://easo.org/perception-survey>.**