



Obesity and women

Clearinghouse Connector – July 2016

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Introduction

Over half of Australian adult women (56.3%) are overweight or obese, compared with 70.8% of men.¹ Although a higher percentage of men are above a healthy weight, the obesity rate in women is equal to that of men (27.5% in 2011-12).² In younger and mid-age Australian women, there is an overall trend of continuing weight gain and increasing levels of overweight and obesity.³

Overweight and obesity prevalence are associated with a wide range of factors including: economic status, age, cultural background, education level, rurality, fresh food supply and availability of green space,³ however weight patterns for these factors differ by gender.³ Socioeconomic disadvantage correlates directly with increased overweight or obesity in women, but not in men.¹ Women aged 45 to 54 have the highest obesity rate among Victorian women.⁴ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 1.7 times more likely to be obese than non-indigenous women.²

Obesity is the primary cause of chronic illness in Australian women,³ and can impact on health at each stage of a woman's life cycle.^{5,6} Being overweight or obese increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes,⁶ and 11 types of cancer including breast, ovarian and endometrial cancer.⁷ Obesity in reproductive-aged women negatively impacts on contraception and fertility, and increases the risk of pregnancy complications (particularly gestational diabetes and hypertension) and poorer infant outcomes.^{6,8} Overweight and obese women and girls face stigma, workplace discrimination, and suffer far more than overweight men and boys from eating disorders and body image issues.⁹ Obesity is also a barrier to women discussing weight and associated health issues with health providers.^{10,11}

At a population level, strategies to address obesity are now focusing less on individual behaviour change and ideas of self-control, and more on better understanding and modifying the obesity-promoting (obesogenic) environment.^{12,13} The primary prevention of obesity may prove more effective and enduring than secondary prevention (treatment after weight gain has occurred).¹⁴ The success rate of weight loss interventions does not differ greatly between women and men.¹⁵ Both obesity prevention initiatives and weight loss interventions may be more effective if framed and delivered in a gender-specific manner.¹⁶

There is growing evidence to suggest that health promotion strategies and public health messaging should consider obesity and eating disorders as part of the same continuum, with common risk/protective factors, and common goals (optimal health, nutrition, food habits, and body image).¹⁷ Further research is needed to better understand gendered weight patterns,¹⁸ and the obesity prevention strategies and interventions that are most effective for women. This will provide evidence to inform multi-level action to address overweight and obesity in Australian women.

Much of the literature about women and obesity is contained within general, rather than women-specific resources – as reflected in the selection of materials for this Connector.

WHV thanks the following expert reviewers for their input:

- Jane Martin – Obesity Policy Coalition
 - Sonya Stanley – VicHealth. Healthy Eating Team
 - Dr. Elizabeth Sturgiss – Australian National University
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Overview

[No time to weight: obesity, a national epidemic and its impact on Australia](#) Obesity Australia, 2014

[We can avoid weight creep: here's how](#) The Conversation, 2016

[Fat city: what can stop obesity?](#) The Saturday Paper. The Monthly Essay, 2013

Prevalence and trends

[Overweight and obesity In: 4364.0.55.001 – National Health Survey: First Results, 2014-15](#) Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015

[Australian heart disease statistics: overweight, obesity and cardiovascular disease: past, present and future](#) National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2015

[Weight gain, overweight and obesity: determinants and health outcomes from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health](#) Current Obesity Reports, 2014

[Morbid obesity in women on the rise: an observational, population-based study](#) BMC Public Health, 2013 – *Australian study*

General women's health

[Obesity and women's health: an evidence-based review](#) Journal of American Board of Family Medicine, 2012

[Half a million new cancers in 2012 due to overweight and obesity: proportion of obesity-related cancers higher in women](#) World Health Organization. International Agency for Research on Cancer, 2014

Sexual and reproductive health

[Obesity and reproduction: a fact file](#) Your Fertility (Fertility Coalition), 2015

[Interventions to reduce and prevent obesity in pre-conceptual and pregnant women: a systematic review and meta-analysis](#) PLoS One, 2014

[Overweight and obesity in Australian mothers: epidemic or endemic?](#) Medical Journal of Australia, 2012

[Development of the Blooming Together Program – a comprehensive model of maternity care incorporating evidence based behavioural change strategies for women with obesity to achieve a healthy pregnancy weight: final research report](#) Telethon Institute for Child Health Research (Perth), 2013

[The role of bariatric surgery in improving reproductive health: scientific impact paper](#) Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (UK), 2015

[Sexuality and obesity, a gender perspective: results from French national random probability survey of sexual behaviours](#) BMJ, 2010

Biological factors

[Obesity and hormones](#) Victoria. Department of Health, 2016 – (Better Health Channel Factsheet)

[The estrogen hypothesis of obesity](#) PLoS One, 2014

[Weight gain at the time of menopause](#) World Obesity Federation Blog, 2015

[Sex-specific weight loss drugs: men’s and women’s brains may react differently to obesity medications](#) Medical Daily, 2016

Mental health and body image

[Promoting self-esteem in overweight and obese girls](#) NPWomen’s Healthcare, 2014

[Technical report: from weight to well-being: time for a shift in paradigms?: a discussion paper on the inter-relationships among obesity, overweight, weight bias and mental well-being](#) British Columbia. Provincial Health Services Authority, 2013

[Weight bias: does it affect men and women differently?](#) Obesity Action Coalition (Florida), 2013

[Studies of obesity, body image and related health issues among Australian adolescents: how can programs in schools interact with and complement each other?](#) Journal of Student Wellbeing, 2010

Relationship between gender and other social determinants

[Weight influences where women choose to live, researchers claim](#) The Age. Domain, 2016

[Obese women face discrimination in job hunt](#) The Conversation, 2012

[The food insecurity-obesity paradox as a vicious cycle for women: a qualitative study](#) Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, 2012

[Explaining the gender gap: obesity costs women a lot more than men](#) Time, 2010

Lifestyle modification

[Effectiveness of weight loss interventions: is there a difference between men and women: a systematic review](#) Obesity Reviews, 2015

[Preventing weight gain in women in rural communities: a cluster randomised controlled trial \[Australia\]](#) PLoS Medicine, 2016

[Behavior and weight correlates of weight-control efforts in Australian women living in disadvantage: The READI study](#) International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, 2013

[Middle-aged women's decisions about body weight management: needs assessment and testing of a knowledge translation tool](#) Menopause, 2015 and [Patient decision aid](#) used in the study

[Experiences of barriers and facilitators to weight-loss in a diet intervention – a qualitative study of women in Northern Sweden](#) BMC Women's Health, 2014

[Goal setting for health behavior change: evidence from an obesity intervention for rural low-income women](#) Rural and Remote Health, 2014

Gender-responsive obesity interventions

[Gender norms and obesity: incorporating gender norms change into clinical interventions](#) Obesity, 2016

[Evidence for gender responsive actions to prevent and manage overweight and obesity: young people's health as a whole-of-society response](#) World Health Organization Europe, 2011

Australian clinical practice guidelines

[A synthesis of selected national Australian guidelines on the general practice management of adult patients who are overweight or obese](#) Australian Family Physician, 2016

[Clinical practice guidelines for the management of overweight and obesity in adults, adolescents and children in Australia](#) Australia. National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013

[Management of obesity in pregnancy](#) RANZCOG College Statement, 2013

Australian policy development

[Obesity /n: National women's health policy](#) Australia. Department of Health, 2011

[Weighing the cost of obesity: a case for action: a study on the additional costs of obesity and benefits of intervention in Australia](#) PricewaterhouseCoopers, October 2015

[Policy at a glance: promoting healthy weight policy](#) Public Health Association of Australia, 2013

[Australia the healthiest country by 2020: technical report 1: obesity in Australia: a need for urgent action](#) Australia. National Preventative Health Taskforce. Obesity Working Group, 2009

Victorian policy development

[Victoria's Citizens' Jury on Obesity](#) VicHealth, 2016. – *See Appendix 2 (Steering Group's Response to 20 recommended actions)*

[Healthy Together Victoria: about us \[Campaign\]](#) Victoria. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016

[Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2015-2019](#) Victoria. Department of Health, 2015 – *See p. 17 'Risk factors'*

[Fat chance \[Video\]](#) ABC Online. Four Corners, 2014 – *Community-level intervention in Ararat, Victoria*

Related websites

[Victoria. Department of Health and Human Services](#) Healthy Together Victoria [Program]

[VicHealth](#) Promoting Healthy Eating [Program]

[Cancer Council Victoria](#) Obesity prevention initiatives

[Obesity Policy Coalition](#)

[Obesity Australia](#)

[Australia. Department of Health](#) Healthy weight guide

[Australia. National Health and Medical Research Council](#) Obesity and overweight

Footnotes

1. ABS (2015). [Overweight and obesity In: 4364.0.55.001 - National Health Survey: First Results, 2014-15](#). Australian Bureau of Statistics. Accessed on 01/07/2016. ↵
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3. Gomersall SR, Dobson AJ, Brown, WJ (2014). [Weight gain, overweight and obesity: determinants and health outcomes from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health](#). Current Obesity Reports. 2014(3): 46-53. Accessed on 01/07/2016. ↵
4. Victoria. Department of Health and Human Services (2016). [Victoria population health survey 2013: selected indicators and trends](#). Victoria. DHHS. p. 34. Accessed on 01/07/2016. ↵
5. Kanter R, Caballero B. (2012). [Global gender disparities in obesity: a review](#). Advances in Nutrition. 3(4): 491-498. Accessed on 01/07/2016. ↵
6. Kulie T, Slattengren A, Redmer J, et al. (2012). [Obesity and women's health: an evidence-based review](#). Journal of American Board of Family Medicine, 24(1) : 75-85. Accessed on 01/07/2016. ↵
7. World Cancer Research Fund International (2016). [Cancer prevention and survival: summary of global evidence on diet, weight and physical activity, and what increases or decreases your chance of cancer](#). WCRF. London. p. 5. Accessed on 01/07/2016. ↵
8. Records K (2016). Obesity and women's health. JOGNN, 44(6): 758-759. ↵
9. King K, Puhl R (2013). [Weight bias: does it affect men and women differently?](#). Obesity Action Coalition (Florida). Accessed on 01/07/2016. ↵
10. Goldkamp J, Gavard JA, Lifits-Podorozhansky Y. et al. (2016). Women's perceptions regarding obesity and comorbidities and provider interaction. JOGNN. 44(6):784-92. ↵
11. Shelley A (2015). [Women's heart health hindered by social stigma about weight](#). Medscape Multispecialty, Apr 3. Accessed on 01/07/2016. ↵
12. Australia. National Preventative Health Taskforce. Obesity Working Group (2009). [Australia: the healthiest country by 2020: technical report 1: obesity in Australia: a need for urgent action](#). Australia. National Preventative Health Taskforce, p.15. Accessed on 01/07/2016. ↵
13. Australia. National Health and Medical Research Council (2015). [Obesity and overweight](#). Circulation. 133(2): 187. Accessed on 01/07/2016. ↵
14. (2016). [Dietary and policy priorities for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and obesity: a comprehensive review](#). NHMRC. Accessed on 01/07/2016. ↵
15. Williams, RL; Wood, LG; Collins, CE; et al (2015). [Effectiveness of weight loss interventions: is there a difference between men and women: a systematic review](#). Obesity Reviews, 2015: 16 : 171-186. Accessed on 01/07/2016. ↵
16. Kanter R, Caballero B. (2012). [Global gender disparities in obesity: a review](#). Advances in Nutrition. 3(4) : 491-498. Accessed on 01/07/2016. ↵
17. National Eating Disorders Collaboration (2015). [Communicating about eating disorders and obesity](#). NEDC. Accessed on 01/07/2016. ↵
18. The Boden Institute of Obesity, Nutrition, Exercise and Eating Disorders; University of Sydney. Menzies Centre for Health Policy (2014). [Weight and gender. In. Obesity prevalence trends in Australia: evidence brief](#). Australian National Preventive Health Agency. p. 6. Accessed on 01/07/2016. ↵

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