

The causes of overweight and obesity fact sheet

Increased weight is caused by increased energy intake (from food and drink), decreased physical activity or a combination of both. National Nutrition Surveys in 1985 and 1995 showed that energy intake had increased significantly by:

- 4 per cent for adults
- 11 per cent for girls aged 10-15 years
- 15 per cent for boys aged 10-15 years.

The dramatic rise for children was due mainly to increased intake of soft drinks, snacks and fast foods.

As well as increasing energy intake (from food and drink), people are spending more time doing activities that involve little movement, like watching television and playing computer games, travelling in cars, and spending less time playing organised sport and doing other physical activities such as walking or cycling to school.

Around 20-25 per cent of Australian children do not do enough physical activity to benefit their health. In 2000, 56 per cent of Queensland children participated in organised sport, which was lower than the national average of 59 per cent. More than half of adult Queenslanders (52 per cent) are not doing enough physical activity to achieve a health benefit (see The Australian Physical Activity Guidelines for recommended levels of activity) - levels of inactivity in Queensland are about 15 per cent higher than national levels. Activity levels have increased in recent years but are still lower than in 1997⁽³⁾.

The facts on poor nutrition

Unhealthy eating may be twice as bad for health as smoking. Poor nutrition is estimated to contribute 16 per cent of the burden of disability and premature death⁽⁴⁾. Heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and cancer are major health problems in Queensland and Australia. These largely preventable diseases, all of which have a strong nutrition component, contributed to about half of the burden of disability and premature death in Australia in 2003.

The facts on physical inactivity

Physical inactivity contributes to around 6400 deaths each year due to coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes and colon cancer, and an additional 2200 more deaths due to other conditions such as stroke⁽⁶⁾. In South East Queensland alone, this relates to about 960 deaths per year. It has also been estimated that the burden of disease due to physical inactivity corresponds to around 36 deaths per day or 1.5 per hour⁽⁷⁾.

(3) Queensland Health. *The Health of Queenslanders 2006. Report of the Chief Health Officer*, Queensland, Queensland Health. Brisbane 2006.

(6) Stephenson, J., A. Bauman, T. Armstrong, B. Smith and B. Bellew. 2000. *The Costs of Illness Attributable to Physical Inactivity in Australia: A Preliminary Study*. Commonwealth of Australia. Canberra, ACT.

(7) Dunstan D, Zimmet P, Welborn T, Sicree R, Armstrong T, Atkins R, et al. Diabetes and associated disorders in Australia-2000: the accelerating epidemic: *The Australian Diabetes, Obesity and Lifestyle Study (AusDiab)*. Melbourne: International Diabetes Institute, 2001.