

Summary

Overweight and obesity are both terms used to identify ranges of weight that are greater than what is generally considered healthy for a given height. They also identify ranges of weight that have been shown to increase the likelihood of certain diseases and other health problems. Obesity and overweight in adulthood are also associated with large decreases in life expectancy and increases in early mortality.

A variety of elements, including individual behaviours, environmental factors, and genetic characteristics, play a role in obesity.

In Canada and many industrialized nations, rates of obesity have risen over the past 20 years, resulting in significant public health implications. A recent study estimated the economic burden of obesity in Canada to be \$4.3 billion in 2001.

According to the results of the 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 32% of Peel adults were overweight and an additional 14% were obese in 2003. This represents almost half (46%) of Peel adults or about 372,000 people. Peel had a slightly lower proportion of overweight and obese adults than Ontario overall. In Peel, in 2003, adult males were more likely to be overweight or obese compared to their female counterparts and the proportion of overweight and obese adults increased across age groups.

Overweight and obese individuals are at increased risk of developing health conditions including, but not limited to, type 2 diabetes mellitus, coronary heart disease, stroke and osteoarthritis. In 2003, approximately 36,900 Peel adults reported having been diagnosed with diabetes by a health professional, 32,000 with heart disease and 44,100 with osteoarthritis. In Ontario, in 2003, the proportion of adults who reported being diagnosed with diabetes, heart disease and osteoarthritis increased with body mass index (BMI) category from adults with a normal weight to those in the obese category.

The effective management of weight involves a range of long-term strategies including healthy eating, physical activity, and environmental factors that have a positive influence on weight.

Healthy eating is important for people of all ages. The consumption of a variety of healthy foods in appropriate portion sizes is important in achieving and maintaining a healthy weight. *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* eating recommends five to 10 servings of fruits and vegetables per day. In 2003, approximately four in every 10 Peel adults reported eating fruits and vegetables five or more times per day. This proportion was the same as that for Ontario (40%). In Peel, adult males were less likely to report eating five or more fruits and vegetables per day than were adult females.

Physical activity plays an important role in energy balance since it uses up calories consumed. Regular physical activity is good for overall health, and provides numerous benefits such as weight control and risk reduction for several health problems such as diabetes, colon cancer and high blood pressure. *Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living* recommends that individuals accumulate 30 to 60 minutes of moderate activity on most days of the week. According to the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), in 2003, more than half (54%) of Peel adults reported being physically inactive compared to 50% of Ontario adults. In Peel, in 2003, physical inactivity increased across age groups. There was no difference in physical activity by sex.

There is growing recognition that the increasing trend of overweight and obesity is being driven by environmental factors that affect our eating and physical activity behaviours. In order to create environments that promote healthy weights, these issues need to be addressed. The Chief Medical officer of Health for Ontario has recently recommended a comprehensive, multi-sectoral strategy to help Ontarians achieve and maintain healthy weights and enjoy healthy lives. The health sector, governments, food and recreation industries, workplace, schools, parents and caregivers, communities and individuals, all have a role to play to reverse the increasing trend in obesity.

While obesity represents a significant burden at the individual and societal levels much can be done to prevent it. The implementation of prevention strategies can help to maintain and achieve healthy weights, thus minimizing the overall burden of overweight and obesity.