



Overweight and obesity among Australian children and adolescents

Overweight and obesity in children and adolescents is a serious health issue that can have lifelong effects. It is associated with poorer health and wellbeing, worse performance at school, and an increased risk of being overweight or obese as an adult.

In Australia, one-quarter (25%) of children and adolescents aged 2–17 are now overweight or obese—17% are overweight and 8.2% are obese. In 2015, overweight and obesity was one of the leading risk factors contributing to disease burden in Australia—only tobacco use had a higher burden.

This fact sheet summarises key findings from the new report *Overweight and obesity among Australian children and adolescents*.

Quick facts

Boys (25%) and girls (24%) are equally likely to be overweight or obese.

Overweight and obesity generally increases with age.

Adolescents and young people are more likely to be overweight or obese today than they were in 2007–08 and 1995.

Who is most likely to be overweight and obese?

Children and adolescents are more likely to be overweight or obese if they live in *Inner regional* areas, live in disadvantaged areas, have disability, or are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin.

Overweight and obesity among children and adolescents aged 2–17 who



How have things changed over time?

The proportion of children and adolescents who are overweight or obese increased significantly between 1995 and 2007–08 (from 20% to 25%), and has remained relatively stable since (Figure 1).

According to results from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, the prevalence of overweight and obesity generally increases with age (up to 31% of adolescents at age 16–17). Children in the study have their weight measured every 2 years. While a small proportion were overweight or obese every time they were measured, more than 4 in 10 were overweight or obese in at least one of their measurements. From about the age of 6–7 onwards, there was generally a higher proportion moving to overweight or obese between consecutive measurements than there were moving to normal or underweight.

Looking across previous years, children and adolescents born in 2003–2012 were more likely to be overweight or obese at age 5–14 than those born earlier (in 1981–1990) at the same age. Adolescents and young people aged 15–24 who were born in 1993–2002 were more likely to be overweight or obese than those born in 1983–1992 and in 1971–1980 at the same age (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Proportion of overweight or obese children and adolescents aged 5–17, over time

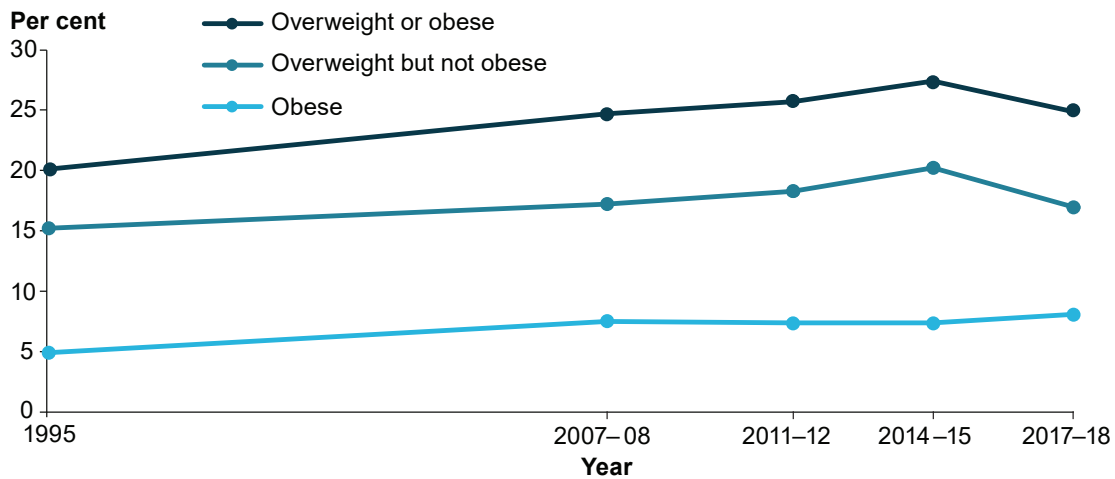
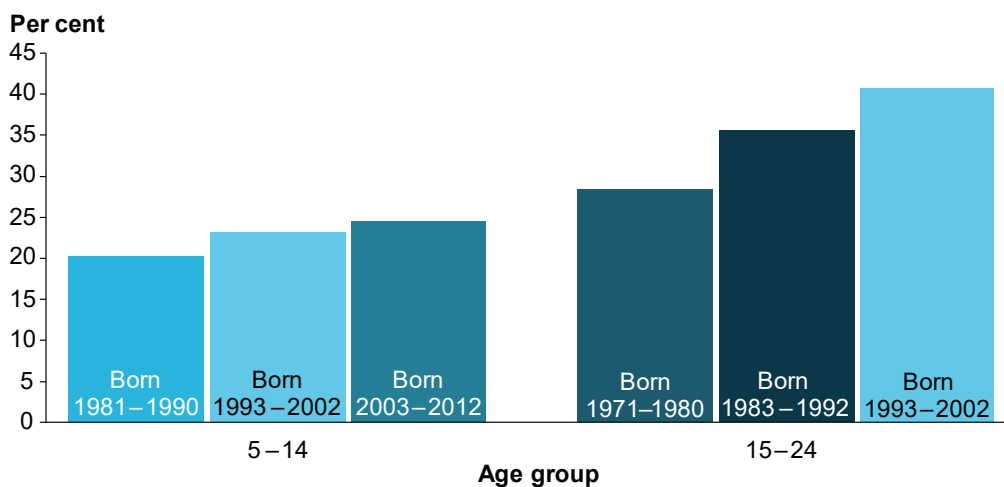


Figure 2. Prevalence of overweight and obesity, by birth cohort and age group



What factors influence overweight and obesity?

The main cause of overweight and obesity is an energy imbalance—the energy people get from eating and drinking is more than the energy they use through physical activity. However, there are many other contributing factors, such as individual genetics, and a range of influences from families, communities and broader society, including:

- Parents' weight—The children of parents with obesity are at a higher risk of becoming obese themselves.
- A child's earliest experiences from conception to the age of 2—Factors in this period that are associated with an increased risk of childhood obesity include maternal diabetes, prenatal tobacco exposure, high or low infant birthweight, and rapid infant weight gain.
- Family food preferences and eating behaviours—Families often eat out and at home rely more on pre-prepared convenience food that can be energy-dense and nutrient-poor.
- The types of food available in and near schools influences students' food choices.
- How well neighbourhood design promotes active travel and the availability of green space such as parks and gardens.
- Food marketing is often targeted at children and adolescents.

For more information, see [Overweight and obesity among Australian children and adolescents](#).

