



In Focus: Obesity in America 2019



IN FOCUS: OBESITY IN AMERICA

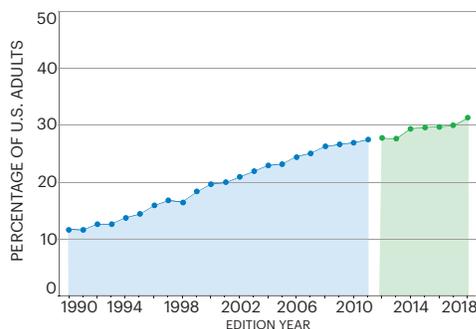
Understanding Obesity Across the Country

Obesity is a risk factor for chronic diseases, including diabetes, heart disease and cancer. It is also associated with decreased physical and mental health, decreased quality of life and increased risk of [premature death](#).¹ Economically, the aggregate medical cost of adult obesity is estimated to be \$342.2 billion per year, representing a sizable burden on the U.S. [health care system](#).²

While nearly one in three adults has obesity, it also impacts seniors and children. The *America's Health Rankings Senior Report* finds that 28.0 percent of seniors have obesity. Research suggests that the strength of the association between obesity and mortality risk [increases with age](#),³ making obesity among seniors a great concern. *America's Health Rankings Health of Women and Children Report* also finds that 31.2 percent of children aged 10 to 17 years are overweight or obese, which is often associated with long-term physical, social and psychological health issues among children and adolescents.

30 Years of Growing Challenges

Obesity has increased dramatically in the United States over the last three decades — climbing 170 percent. In 1990, 11.6 percent of American adults were obese. Today, that percentage has risen to 31.3 percent. In the past year alone, obesity increased by 5 percent, the largest year-over-year increase since 2014.



Definition: Percentage of U.S. adults with a body mass index of 30.0 or higher based on reported height and weight.
Source: CDC, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)
Note: Blue dots represent pre-2011 BRFSS methodology

Obesity in the States

- Obesity has more than doubled since 1990 in all 50 states.
- Since 1990, Florida has had the smallest increase (108%) and Colorado has had the largest increase (228%).
- Colorado, the state with the lowest prevalence of obesity in 2018 (22.6%) has more adults with obesity today than Mississippi, the state with the highest prevalence of obesity in 1998 (22.0%).

Over the past 30 years, Florida, Nevada and Wyoming have experienced the greatest improvements in rankings when it comes to obesity (moving 29, 28 and 28 ranks among the 50 states, respectively), while Oklahoma, Ohio and South Dakota have dropped the most in the rankings (decreasing 25, 19 and 16 ranks, respectively).

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/adult/causes.html>

² <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs11606-016-3968-8.pdf>

³ <https://academic.oup.com/aje/article/177/5/431/142495>

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Impact of Obesity by Subpopulation and State

Some populations are disproportionately affected by higher rates of obesity. Obesity prevalence is higher among black (39.0 percent), American Indian/Alaskan Native (38.7 percent) and Hispanic (32.4 percent) adults, compared to white (29.3 percent) and Asian (11.2 percent) adults. Additionally, obesity prevalence is significantly higher among individuals with lower educational attainment and income.

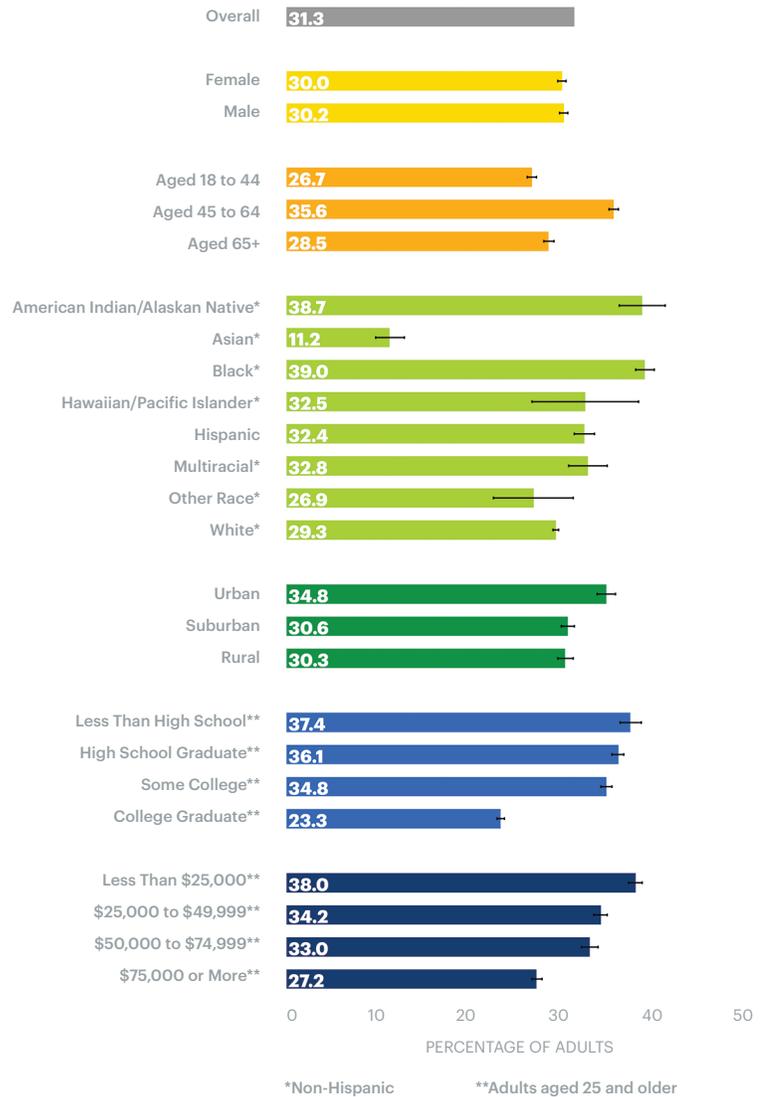
In 2018, Colorado has the lowest prevalence of obesity (22.6 percent) while West Virginia has the highest prevalence (38.1 percent).

The top five healthiest states for obesity are

- #1 Colorado 22.6%
- #2 Hawaii 23.8%
- #3 California 25.1%
- #4 Utah 25.2%
- #5 Montana 25.3%

The five states with the greatest opportunity for improvement are

- #1 West Virginia 38.1%
- #2 Mississippi 37.3%
- #3 Oklahoma 36.5%
- #4 Iowa 36.4%
- #5 Alabama 36.3%



Addressing the Challenge: Taking Action to Promote Healthy Eating

“ The program aims to train the next generation to make mindful decisions – to know the difference between healthy and unhealthy decisions. ”

Gracie Cavnar, Founder, Recipe for Success



Urban areas often face barriers to accessing fresh, whole foods and the knowledge needed to make healthy food choices can be limited. These challenges can lead to childhood obesity and have significant long-term effects on whole person health. One approach to addressing the obesity epidemic is to improve the availability of fruits and vegetables, while teaching and promoting healthy eating habits.

Recipe for Success and the United Health Foundation announced a partnership in 2017 to improve access to fresh, healthy food in underserved communities in South Houston. By working with Houston's Hope Farms, **the grant funds training for local veterans interested in owning farms to be urban farmers**, and provides an opportunity for them to colonize a seven-acre plot of their own. Fresh produce from the farms is sold to local families through on-site and citywide markets.

Funding from the United Health Foundation has also helped Recipe for Success to launch Affiliate Partnerships of Seed-to-Plate Nutrition Education™ in 15 new campuses and engage more than 11,000 students in Pre-K through eighth grade.

United Health Foundation is supporting Recipe for Success' mission and empowering families to make healthy choices through nutrition classes, meal prep and interaction with the veteran farmers — all helping to build healthier communities for families. Data from America's Health Rankings helps the United Health Foundation both identify health challenges and develop partnerships to deliver solutions in communities across the country.