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Trends in overweight and obesity in a representative sample of Irish adults

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Obesity is a serious and complex public health issue that can have a significant detrimental effect on health⁽¹⁾. A BMI equal to or greater than 25 kg/m² defines overweight, while a BMI equal to or over 30 kg/m² defines obesity, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO)⁽¹⁾.

The aim of this research was to investigate trends in overweight and obesity in the Republic of Ireland. This was assessed using data from the Irish National Nutrition Survey (INNS, 1990)⁽²⁾, the North South Ireland Food Consumption Survey (NSIFCS, 2001)⁽³⁾ and the National Adult Nutrition Survey (NANS, 2011)⁽⁴⁾. BMI was determined as weight (kg) divided by height (m) squared and cut-offs defined according to the WHO⁽¹⁾.

		Age group (years)	n	Underweight (%) ≤ 18.49	Normal (%) 18.5–24.9	Overweight (%) 25.0–29.9	Obese (%) ≥ 30	P-Value*	
INNS	All	18–64	590	1.7	49.5	38.1	10.7	<0.05	
		NSIFCS	18–64	1311	0.8	42.4	39.0		17.8
		NANS	18–64	1165	0.8	38.5	37.3		23.5
INNS	Men	18–64	256	0.4	41.0	50.8	7.8		
		NSIFCS	18–64	613	0.3	33.3	46.3		20.1
		NANS	18–64	573	0.3	30	43.8		25.8
INNS	Women	18–64	334	2.7	56.0	28.1	12.9		
		NSIFCS	18–64	698	1.1	50.4	32.5		15.9
		NANS	18–64	592	1.2	46.6	30.9		21.3

*P<0.05 denotes significant differences between the three surveys for levels of normal, overweight and obesity (Crosstabs and Chi-square test). INNS, Irish National Nutrition Survey; NSIFCS, North South Ireland Food Consumption Survey; NANS, National Adult Nutrition Survey.

The prevalence of obesity in Irish adults has increased approximately 2.2-fold during the last three decades. This trend is evident for both men (3.3-fold increase) and women (1.7-fold increase). In contrast, the prevalence of normal weight has decreased between 1990 (INNS) and 2011 (NANS) for the total population and for both men and women. Significant changes in the proportion of the population classified as overweight were also observed.

These results highlight the growing trend of obesity in Irish adults. Effective treatment and prevention strategies are needed to avoid further increases in the next decade.

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