

Summary

Knowledge and opinions about overweight and health in the Danish population 2023

Definition of overweight

Throughout the report, the term “overweight” includes both overweight and obesity, defined as a BMI of 25 and above.

This report describes the Danish population’s knowledge and opinions about overweight and health in 2023. It covers themes such as: knowledge of the causes of overweight; the links between overweight and disease; opinions on the challenges posed by the rising prevalence of overweight in Denmark, weight prejudice, weight stigma, as well as opinions on prevention and treatment of overweight, and perceptions of own body weight.

The report is based on data from an online survey among 5,220 adult Danes (18 years or older) conducted in March 2023. The survey sample was representative of the Danish population in terms of gender, age, area of residence, and education. Data collection was conducted by the market research company © Kantar Public for the Danish Cancer Society, the Danish Health Authority, the Danish Diabetes Association, the Danish Heart Association, and The Danish National Center for Obesity.

Danes are aware that both genetics, behaviour, and structural conditions play a role in the development of overweight

Around 9 in 10 respondents are aware that unhealthy dietary habits (92 %) and insufficient physical activity (89 %) can contribute to the development of overweight. At the same time, most respondents are aware that structural conditions - such as easy access to food and drinks with a high content of fat, sugar, or salt (80%), and environments that limit

physical activity in everyday life (70%) – can contribute to the development of overweight. Additionally, 75% of all respondents are aware that genetics and heredity play a role, and 83% believe that certain social and psychological aspects, such as reduced well-being or reduced quality of life, can contribute to the development of overweight.

Knowledge of the associations between overweight and a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer has decreased

As was the case in previous surveys, most respondents know that overweight increases the risk of type 2 diabetes (81%), and cardiovascular disease (76%). Less than 3 out of 10 respondents (28%) know that overweight increases the risk of cancer. Knowledge of the associations between overweight and type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer has decreased compared to previous surveys conducted in 2019 and 2021.

The proportion of respondents who believe overweight increases the risk of mental challenges has increased compared to previous surveys: 7 out of 10 (70 %) state that overweight increases the risk of reduced well-being and quality of life, while more than half (54%) mention depression and other psychosocial challenges.

Overweight is perceived as both an individual and a societal challenge

Close to 9 out of 10 respondents (88%) believe overweight is a problem for people living with overweight. Three-quarters of respondents (75 %) believe overweight is a problem for the Danish society. More than 8 out of 10 believe overweight is a problem for the Danish healthcare system (81%), and a serious health issue (84%). Just under 7 out of 10 respond-

ents (68%) believe it is a problem for the Danish society's economy.

Respondents were quite divided in their view on whether developing overweight is one's own fault or not. Just over a third believe it is one's own fault (35%), while 3 out of 10 (30%) disagree with this statement. Almost two-thirds (63%) believe it is the parents' fault if children have developed overweight.

Overweight is perceived as a risk factor for disease that is harmful for your health

9 out of 10 respondents (90%) believe overweight increases the risk of disease, while just under half (49%) believe overweight is a disease. Approximately a fifth of respondents believe overweight is not harmful to health if you are physically active (22%) and eat healthily (16%). Around half of respondents believe overweight is harmful for your health even if you are physically active (49%) and eat healthily (55%).

Most Danes think that people living with overweight should live healthier and lose weight

Almost 7 out of 10 respondents (67%) believe people living with overweight should live more healthily and lose weight. A little more than half also believe people living with overweight eat more unhealthily (53%) and are less physically active (69%) than people without overweight. 3 out of 10 respondents (30%) believe people living with overweight lack willpower and are lazier than people without overweight.

Overweight prevention is seen more as an individual responsibility than as a responsibility of commercial actors or decision-makers

Most respondents think responsibility for preventing overweight is more directly an individual issue (82%) and an issue concerning actors from one's close environment, such as the family (67%) and the general practitioner (68%).

More than half believe decision-makers, such as the Danish Parliament (50%), the Danish Regions (59%), and municipalities (53%) have a responsibility for preventing overweight.

Just under 6 out of 10 respondents (57%) believe the food industry has a responsibility to prevent overweight, for example through product development of healthier foods and by offering smaller portion sizes. Less than half (45%) believe that retail stores have a responsibility to prevent overweight.

Danes think the treatment and management of overweight lies with the individual to a greater extent than with decision-makers and the pharmaceutical industry

More than 8 out of 10 respondents (84%) think the responsibility for treatment or management of overweight lies with the individual. Just under three-quarters (74%) place a responsibility with the general practitioner.

More than half of respondents believe that decision-makers such as the Danish Parliament (53%), the Danish Regions (62%), and municipalities (53%) have a responsibility. Less than 4 out of 10 respondents (37%) believe the pharmaceutical industry has a responsibility, for example by producing weight-loss medication.

Danes support lower prices on healthy foods as a tool for promoting healthier choices

More than 8 out of 10 respondents (81%) believe it is a good idea to lower the prices of healthy products, e.g., fruits and vegetables, to make it easier for Danes to live healthier. Just under half (48%) believe it is a good idea to increase the prices of food and drinks with a high content of fat, sugar, or salt, e.g., snacks, chips, or sweets, while almost a quarter of respondents (22%) are neutral, and a little more than a fourth is against it (26%).

Positive opinions on given examples of structural prevention initiatives aimed towards children and youth

More than 6 out of 10 respondents (64%) believe it is a good idea to implement mandatory regulation of advertisements and hidden advertisements for food and drinks with a high content of fat, sugar, or salt aimed at children and youth under 18 years of age. Three-quarters (75%) believe physical activity (45 minutes/day) must be included as part of the school day. Furthermore, more than three-quarters (77%) believe mental health should be part of the primary school curriculum. Approximately two-thirds believe that both daycare institutions and primary schools should offer healthy and free meals (65%), and that children and youth under 18 years of age have a right to free therapy with a certified psychologist (67%).