

# Generation X and baby boomers face obesity time bomb

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Medical Editor

Baby boomers and Generation Xers are stacking on weight much more rapidly than people born in earlier eras.

If current trends continue, more than a third of people now in their mid-20s to mid-50s will be obese by 2013, new research shows.

The Adelaide study, based on annual health interviews with more than 3000 people, shows a gradual increase in the weight-to-height ratio of both age groups during the early 1990s, which accelerated rapidly at the end of the decade and is still climbing.

Among the baby boomers, men and women showed a similar pattern of weight gain, with just over a quarter obese in 2003.

That could rise to 40 per cent by 2013 if they continued to gain weight at the same rate, said Tiffany Gill, an epidemiologist at South Australia's Department of Health.

Among the Generation X group, more women than men were likely to enter the obese category, a body mass index of 30 or more, Ms Gill said. The projections indicated a third of them would be obese after another decade, compared with one in five Generation X men.

The results back up recent statistics from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, which found women in their 20s had put on an average of five kilograms in just seven years.

Excess weight is linked to the early development of heart disease, diabetes, asthma, arthritis and pregnancy complications.

Because the randomly selected participants in the Adelaide study told researchers their weight and height - rather than having them independently measured - it was likely an even higher proportion

## Too much on their plate

If you eat too much fat one day, don't count on yourself to be good the next day and eat less.

People offered large meals will eat them day after day, says a study presented at a conference of obesity researchers in Vancouver.

Health experts have pointed to large portions, such as "supersized" fast-food meals, as a culprit in the dramatic rise in obesity rates in the United States and Australia.

Sixty-four per cent of Americans are considered to be overweight or obese.

"I think it's quite obvious we

need innovative strategies to limit the impact of portion size on intake," said Barbara Rolls of Pennsylvania State University, who conducted the study.

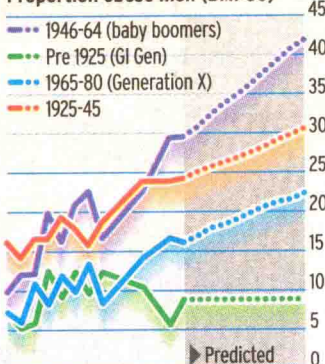
The researchers tracked the eating habits and energy intake of nearly two dozen people over 11 days, making it one of the longest studies of its kind.

People would consistently eat more when offered large meals, except in the case of vegetables.

"As someone who had been pushing fruits and vegetables for weight reduction I find this quite discouraging," Dr Rolls said. Reuters

### WEIGHT FOR AGE

Proportion obese men (BMI>30)



SOURCES: AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
BMI=WEIGHT (KILOGRAMS) DIVIDED BY SQUARE OF HEIGHT (METRES)

might be truly obese, said Ms Gill, whose study is published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. Men typically overestimated their height, while women usually understated their weight, she said.

Ms Gill said public health initiatives against obesity had focused mainly on the issue among children. Her survey was the first to indicate that the problem was

also worsening dramatically among young adults. "The kids are in the schools and you can target things at them," Ms Gill said. "It's harder when people are out at work or in the community."

A separate study, carried out by the University of Melbourne, found people were a third less likely to get adequate exercise if they lived in the poorest districts, defined as those with the highest proportion of households living on less than \$400 a week.

The study leader, Anne Kavanagh, also found clear differences between districts in the likelihood of people walking, cycling or swimming, though these were not always linked to the affluence of residents.

Associate Professor Kavanagh, whose report was published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Public Health*, said future research should look at the availability and quality of walking and cycling paths, lighting and safety, parks and swimming pools to determine whether these made a difference to exercise patterns.