



It's good and bad news from the fat front

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THE nation's largest health survey has revealed rates of childhood obesity have plateaued, despite the emergence of what experts have labelled a "frightening public health crisis" of obesity among adults.

Seventy per cent of Australian men and 56 per cent of women are overweight or obese, initial findings from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Australian Health Survey 2011-13 found, cementing Australia's place as one of the fattest nations in the world.

But a public health campaign against childhood obesity — which has led school canteens to banish fatty meat pies and sausage rolls and to increased exercise for children — appears to have paid dividends, with no change in the proportion of children classified as overweight or obese since 2007-08.

Results from a 2007-08 National Health Survey indicated 24.9 per cent of children aged five to 17 were overweight or obese. That figure is stable, though still not good, with yesterday's health survey showing that 17.7 per cent

of Australian children were overweight and 7.6 per cent obese.

The Australian Health Survey, the most comprehensive undertaken, for the first time took waist circumference measurements and measured blood pressure among participants, delivering similarly alarming findings.

On average, men aged 18 and over had a waist measurement of 97.9cm, while women's was 87.7cm. Healthy waist circumference is 94cm or less for men and 80cm or less for women. Between 2007-08 and 2011-12, average waist measurements increased by 1.7cm for men and 1.9cm for women.

The survey also found that more than 20 per cent of Australians had high blood pressure, a figure described as "alarming" by ABS statistician David Zago. "That finding was much higher than what we expected."

Of particular concern were the large numbers of young people — 65.5 per cent of men aged 25-34 — who were overweight or obese.

Brisbane law student Tom Hills, 25, said super-sized and

takeaway meals were considered "the norm" among his age group.

Mr Hills is on track to reverse his overweight-related health issues after losing 26kg in 18 weeks with the Wesley Weight Management Clinic, and is on track to meet his target of less than 90kg.

"I'm not sluggish anymore," he said. "I wake up and I can participate. I go to work feeling great or I go to uni feeling great."

Executive manager of the Obesity Policy Coalition Jane Martin said the findings of the survey were "very, very worrying". "This is a really urgent public health issue," Ms Martin said.

The fact that childhood obesity had not increased was encouraging, she said.

"It is the first time we've seen a national survey showing this levelling-off in children."

The survey showed rates of drinking and smoking have dropped. Sixteen per cent of Australians now smoke daily, a fall of three percentage points during the past four years, but almost 20 per cent consume more than two standard drinks each day.

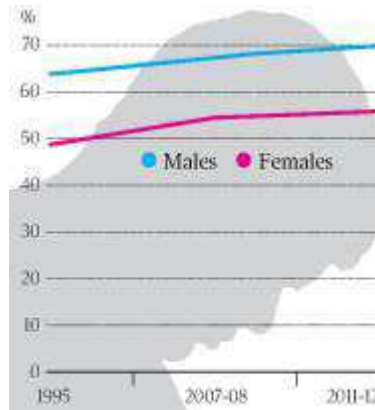


Tom Hills, 25, of Paddington, Brisbane, at the Wesley Weight Management Clinic with manager Nicola Moore

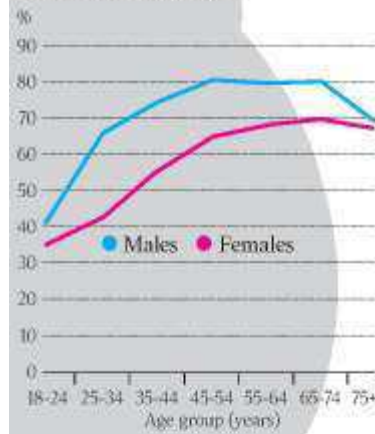




THE TUBBY COUNTRY
Proportion of overweight or obese adults since 1995



Proportion of overweight or obese adults by age



Body mass index of children aged 5-17, 2011-12

