



Nation's number of obese growing

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THE number of Australians who are overweight and obese has bulged over the past four years, government statistics show.

Australians are growing taller and heavier, with average height up 0.8 of a centimetre for men and 0.4 of a centimetre for women since 1995.

The average Australian man has gained 3.9 kilograms and the average Australian woman 4.1 kilograms over the same period. In 2011-12, the average Australian man was 175.6cm tall and weighed 85.9kg, and the average Australian woman was 161.8cm tall and weighed 71.1kg.

Initial results from the 2011-12 health survey, released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics yesterday, show 63 per cent of adults are overweight (35 per cent) or obese (28 per cent). The figure was up from 61 per cent in 2007-08, an increase experts said was concerning.

The data shows more men were overweight or obese (70 per cent) than women (56 per cent), but rates have increased for both genders over the past four years.

Childhood obesity appears to have stabilised, with a quarter

of children overweight or obese, unchanged from four years ago.

In other findings:

- About 16 per cent of adult Australians were daily smokers, down from 19 per cent in 2007-08;

- 19.5 per cent of Australians exceeded guidelines by drinking more than two standard drinks a day, down from 21 per cent;

- More than 13 per cent of Australians reported having a mental or behavioural condition, up from 11 per cent;

- More than 60 per cent of adult men and 67 per cent of women had a waist circumference that put them at increased risk of developing chronic disease in 2011-12, and;

- 21.5 per cent of adults had high blood pressure.

Heart Foundation chief executive Lyn Roberts said more Australians were "at risk of eating ourselves to death" and called for urgent action to reduce salt and saturated fat in processed foods.

Work was under way through the government's food and health dialogue, through which food manufacturers commit to voluntary targets, but the program

needed to deliver results more quickly. "This data just confirms how important and urgent this work is for the health of millions of Australians," she said.

Obesity Policy Coalition spokeswoman Jane Martin said policies encouraging physical activity and healthy eating appeared to be having an effect in stabilising the rate of overweight and obese children, but more was needed to reduce it, including food labelling.

SINCE 1995

AVERAGE HEIGHT

▲ Up 0.8 cm to 175.6cms (men)

▲ Up 0.4 cm to 161.8cm (women)

OVERWEIGHT OR OBESE

70% (men)

56% (women)

26% (children 5-17)

▲ Up 3.9 kg to 85.9kg (men)

▲ Up 4.1 kg to 71.1kg (women)

SMOKING

16% smoke daily

▼ Down from 19% in 2007-08

DRINKING

19.5% drink more than two standard drinks a day

▼ Down from 21% in 2007-08

MENTAL HEALTH

More than 13% reported having a mental or behavioural condition,

▲ Up from 11% in 2007-08