



People failing to win battle of bulge

By Kate Hagan

The number of Australians who are overweight and obese has bulged over the past four years, new 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 man has gained 3.9 kilograms and the average woman 4.1 kilograms over the same period.

Initial results from the 2011-12 Australian health survey, released by the Bureau of Statistics yesterday, show that 63 per cent of adults are overweight or obese. A total of 35 per cent are overweight and 28 per cent obese.

The overall 63 per cent who were overweight or obese 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.

About 18 per cent of children aged between five and 17 were overweight and 8 per cent were obese in 2011-12, with more girls affected than boys.

In other findings:

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

■ 19.5 per cent exceeded guidelin-

es by drinking more than two standard drinks a day, down from 21 per cent;

■ More than 13 per cent 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”.

She called for urgent action to reduce salt and saturated fat in processed foods.

Ms Roberts said 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.

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

She said adults were becoming overweight and obese at a younger age and a comprehensive plan, including improved food labelling, was needed to make it easier for people to make healthier choices.

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