



HEALTHY WEIGHTS

BODY WEIGHTS AND BODY IMAGE REMAIN LEADING PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN CANADA

OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

Healthy weights promote both good health and emotional well-being. The terms *overweight* and *obesity* are used to describe people with excess body weight and fat, to the point that their health is affected in negative ways. Causes of overweight and obesity are well known. Over time, limited levels of physical activity, too much time spent in sedentary behaviours such as watching television and surfing the web, and overconsumption of foods, particularly those that are high in sugars and fats, can lead to excessive weight and obesity.

In addition to their immediate and long-term consequences on physical health, overweight and obesity can impact upon the mental health of young people. Having a body that is perceived to be too fat can lead to low self-esteem. At the other extreme, obsession over excess body weight can lead to eating disorders, such as bulimia or anorexia.

Although properly monitored and regulated weight-control practices may be appropriate for obese young people, extreme weight control and weight loss practices may negatively affect a young person's health.

Based upon their self-reported heights and weights, about one in four of the boys and one in six of the girls that were studied were obese or overweight. These figures are consistent with estimates made in 2002 and 2006.



This fact sheet was developed from the *Canadian Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC)* survey. The HBSC survey has been conducted on six occasions in Canada (since 1989) by the Social Program Evaluation Group at Queen's University.

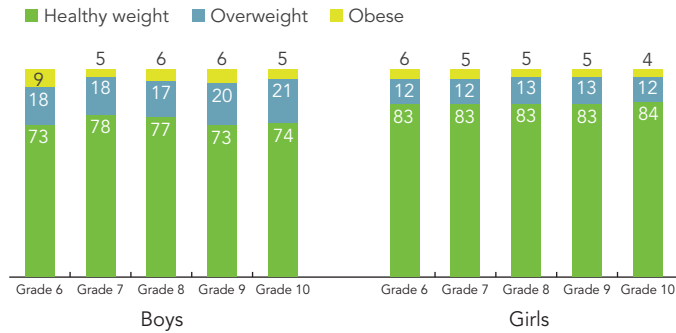
It profiles the health of young Canadians aged 11–15 years. The 2010 Canadian national report focused on mental health. HBSC in Canada is also part of a larger international study conducted in affiliation with the World Health Organization, with similar 2010 surveys administered in 39 mainly European and North American countries. The Canadian study is supported by funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada.

See: Janssen, I. (2011). Healthy Weights. In J. Freeman et al. (Ed.), *The health of Canada's young people: a mental health focus* (pp. 135–144). Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada.

For more information about the HBSC study and for Canada-specific data, please visit: www.publichealth.gc.ca

For international data, visit the HBSC global site at: www.hbosc.org

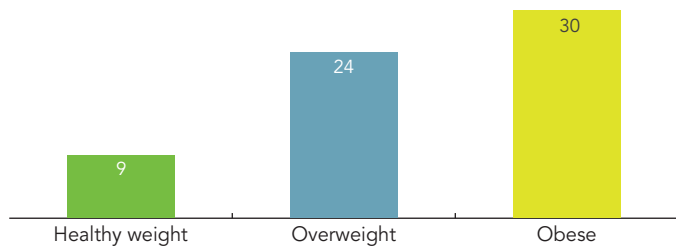
YOUNG PEOPLE REPORTING OVERWEIGHT AND OBESE (%)
[BASED ON SELF-REPORTED HEIGHTS AND WEIGHTS]



WEIGHT LOSS PRACTICES

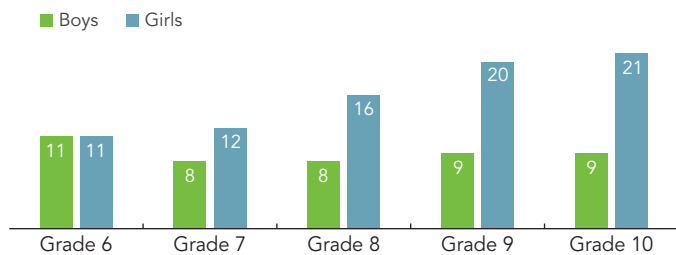
There was a strong link between reported body sizes and engagement in weight loss practices. Higher proportions of young people who were obese or overweight reported doing something to lose weight.

DOING SOMETHING TO LOSE WEIGHT, BY REPORTED BMI CATEGORY (%)



Engagement in weight loss practices varied by gender and grade level. More girls than boys reported such behaviours, with clear increases in these behaviours among girls in the higher grades.

DOING SOMETHING TO LOSE WEIGHT (%)



BODY IMAGE

Young people often feel dissatisfied with their body weight and size. This is particularly an issue for girls, who more often believe that their body is “too fat”. These feelings appear to increase as young people get older, peaking for both genders in grade 10. However, the percentage of girls who believed their body was too fat was far greater than the percentage of girls who are actually overweight or obese.

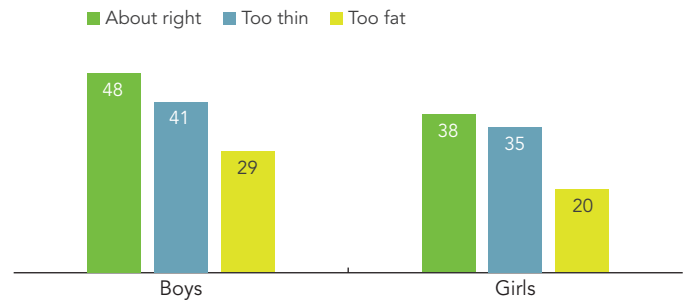
BODY IMAGE (%)



Young peoples’ body image has not changed very much from 2002 to 2010.

Relationships between body image and mental health

LEVELS OF EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING BY BODY IMAGE (%)



Among both boys and girls, strong correlations exist between body image and several indicators of mental health. For example, both boys and girls who think that their body is “too fat” are much less likely to report high levels of emotional well-being. Having a body that was perceived to be “too thin” was also correlated with lower levels of emotional well-being, but to a lesser extent.