

Too many young Australians are overweight

Being overweight increases the risk for many serious health problems: heart disease, diabetes, some cancers and respiratory problems, among others. In addition to these, overweight in childhood and adolescence can cause joint problems and psycho-social problems.

A recent study has shown that more than 20% of young Australians are either overweight or obese. The study involved data from more than 11,000 Australian children and adolescents collected in three surveys: one in NSW, one in Victoria and one national survey.

There were few clear patterns in the data. There was little difference between boys and girls, across age groups, between young people living in rural or metropolitan areas or between young people from different socio-economic backgrounds. However, one notable finding was that a greater proportion of young people from European or Middle-eastern cultural backgrounds were overweight or obese.

Speaking at the 9th Scientific Meeting of the Australasian Society for the Study of Obesity, Dr Michael Booth, of the NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health and chief investigator of the study, said,

“Three completely independent data sets gave us very similar answers, increasing our confidence in the findings. This is the first time we have had data like this and the results give rise to real concern.”

“The United States has the highest proportion of overweight adults in the world, but Australia is a close second. That gives us a silver medal we would rather not have.”

“One of the best ways to deal with overweight is to ensure that relatively few people enter adulthood overweight, and we are doing just the opposite. This is not a problem that can be changed quickly: we need determined and sustained action.”