



# The sharp rise in overweight and obesity in Asia and the Pacific threatens their prosperity

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Obesity has reached world-wide epidemic proportions. Overweight and obesity weaken the body, hamper lower-body mobility, and impede daily activities. In older people, they cause physical dysfunction and increase the risk of disability. Overweight and obesity also raise the risks for ischemic heart disease, hypertension, stroke, diabetes, and certain cancers.

Overweight is commonly defined as having a body mass index — or BMI — exceeding 25, and obesity as having a BMI over 30. The risk of having a coronary heart disease or stroke is higher for the overweight and obese than for those of normal weight. Being overweight or obese also increases the risk for at least 13 types of cancer. Type 2 diabetes is most directly related to overweight and obesity. Obesity lowers women's and men's fertility. The World Health Organization estimated that in 2013, 4.5 million deaths worldwide were caused by overweight and obesity.

In 2013, 40.9% of adults in Asia and the Pacific were overweight and obese. The region's economies have grown rapidly in the past decades. Along with growth came changes in people's lifestyles, including eating habits. Food is increasingly available and cheaper, encouraging overeating and excessive weight gain. The rapid urbanization of Asia has also contributed to the increase in overweight, as people move to more sedentary jobs in manufacturing and services.

The Pacific region has by far the highest percentage of overweight and obese people. By 2013, an alarming 61% of the population was overweight or obese. Central Asia ranked second with almost 50%. Southeast Asia, South Asia, and East Asia have a smaller percentage of obese and overweight people but have witnessed the sharpest increases in these conditions.

This has been a summary of part of [The Imminent Obesity Crisis in Asia and the Pacific: First Cost Estimates](#), a working paper by ADBI senior economist and head of research [Matthias Helble](#) and ADBI research associate [Kris Francisco](#).

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- [Obesity in Pacific Island countries and territories: How big a problem is it?](#)  
*By Jillian Wate*