

**OBESITY EPIDEMIC** Nine million adults classed as overweight or obese

# Australia's ticking 'fat bomb'

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AUSTRALIA has become the fattest nation in the world, with more than 9 million adults now rated as obese or overweight, according to an alarming new report.

The most definitive picture of the national obesity crisis to date has found that Australians now outweigh Americans and face a future "fat bomb" that could cause 123,000 premature deaths over the next two decades.

If the crisis is not averted, obesity experts have warned, health costs could top \$6 billion and an extra 700,000 people will be admitted to hospital for heart attacks, strokes and blood clots caused by excess weight.

The latest figures show 4 million Australians — or 26% of the adult population — are now obese compared to an estimated 25% of Americans. A further 5 million Australians are considered overweight.

**‘If we ran a fat Olympics we’d be gold medal winners as the fattest people on earth at the moment.’**

Professor Simon Stewart

The report, *Australia's Future 'Fat Bomb'*, from Melbourne's Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute, will be presented at the Federal Government's inquiry into obesity, which comes to Melbourne today.

A grim picture is painted of expanding waistlines fuelled by a boom in fast food and a decline in physical activity, turning us into a nation of couch potatoes.

Those most at risk of premature death are the middle-aged,

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metres squared. A BMI of more than 25 is considered overweight while more than 30 is obese.

But the tool does not distinguish between muscle and fat, prompting calls for the BMI overweight limit to be raised to 28.

However, even leading nutritionist Jenny O'Dea from the University of Sydney — who recently claimed Australia's childhood obesity epidemic had been exaggerated — has backed the new figures, which suggest that the crisis for adults has been drastically underestimated.

Professor O'Dea said that while being fat was not necessarily a health risk for everyone, there was no doubt obesity was taking its toll on the nation.

It was previously thought that around 3 million adults were obese. But many past surveys were seen as unreliable as they often required participants to guess their own weight.

The latest data was based on more than 14,000 people at 100 rural and metropolitan sites in every Australian state and territory. Each had their BMI recorded by having their weight, height and waist measured as part of a national blood pressure screening day last year.

The report's lead author, Simon Stewart, said that even allowing for the BMI's potential failings, the best case scenario was that 3.6 million adults were battling obesity.

"Our perception of obese is someone who is morbidly obese," said Professor Stewart, head of preventive cardiology at Baker IDI. "But many people

**FAT NATION**  
*Motto: Our girth is plain to see*

	THEN...	... NOW
<b>FOOD</b>	47 litres	113 litres
Average volume of soft drink consumed per person per year in Australia in the 1970s and in the 2000s		
<b>Fast food burger fat content is twice level of 20 years ago</b>	12-24 grams	24-42 grams
<b>PORTION SIZE</b>	30 grams	50 grams
Standard packet of chips size in 1970s and now		
<b>INACTIVITY</b>		70% (more than 1.4 million cars)
Increase in number of cars driven to work each day in Australian capital cities between 1976 and 2006:	4 cars	14 cars

**HOW THE STUDY MEASURED OBESITY**      **MEN OF AVERAGE HEIGHT** (1.78 metres)      **WOMEN OF AVERAGE HEIGHT** (1.64 metres)      **WHAT IT MEANS**      BMI does not differentiate between body fat and muscle