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Overweight? Obese? Or Normal Weight? Americans Have Hard Time Gauging Their Weight

New poll finds 30% of those overweight think they are normal size

NORWALK, Connecticut, USA (September 2, 2010) – For many Americans fat is the new “norm.” More and more people are unable to accurately describe themselves using their height-to-weight ratio – known as body mass index – the scale that determines levels of overweight and obesity, a new Harris Interactive/HealthDay poll found.

The poll revealed that 30 percent of overweight people think they're actually normal size, 70 percent of obese people feel they are merely overweight, and 39 percent of morbidly obese people think they are overweight but not obese.

That means fat may be becoming the new normal, raising the specter of increasing rates of health threats such as diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers.

"While there are some people who have body images in line with their actual BMI [body mass index], for many people they are not, and this may be where part of the problem lies," said Regina Corso, vice president of Harris Poll Solutions. "If they do not recognize the problem or don't recognize the severity of the problem, they are less likely to do something about it.

Among other findings of the poll, conducted online Aug. 17-19 with 2,418 adults ages 18 and older:

- Most respondents who felt they were heavier than they should be blamed lack of exercise as the main cause, with 52 percent of overweight people, 75 percent of obese people and 75 percent of morbidly obese people saying they didn't exercise enough.
- Food consumption was seen as the lesser of two culprits, with 36 percent of overweight respondents, 48 percent of obese respondents and 27 percent of those morbidly obese feeling they ate more than they "should in general."

"In the mindset of most Americans, they're not looking at this as a food problem as much as an exercise problem," Corso said. "Three out of five Americans overall are saying they don't exercise as much as they should."

On the subject of weight-loss remedies, the poll found Americans deemed surgery the most effective method, followed by prescription drugs, then drugs and diet-food supplements obtained over-the-counter.

"Americans like the quick fix and that's what they think the surgery is even though there are so many other things" that work, Corso said. "The American public knows this but it's hard and it's something that they're not quite ready to do. This wake-up call still isn't ringing as loudly as it could."

The complete findings of this Harris Interactive/HealthDay poll is available online [here](#). HealthDay's news report is available [here](#). Full data on the poll and its methodology are available at [Harris Interactive](#).

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Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the United States between August 17-19, 2010 among 2,418 adults ages 18 and older. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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