

Overweight and Obesity
among Adults in North Carolina

FACT SHEET

Community & Clinical Connections for Prevention & Health Branch | North Carolina DHHS | Division of Public Health

What are overweight and obesity?

Overweight and obesity are conditions that result from having extra body fat and/or abnormal body fat distribution.

- For adults, the amount of body fat is estimated by using weight and height to calculate a number called the body mass index (BMI).
- For an adult BMI calculator visit eatsmartmovemorenc.com/bmi-calculator. BMI is not a direct measure of body fat, but for most people, it correlates with their amount of body fat.
- Overweight and obesity are generally defined by ranges of BMI that are associated with an increased likelihood of certain diseases and other health problems. Table 1 shows how BMI is generally used to classify weight status for adults.
- A variety of factors play a role in overweight and obesity including: environment, socioeconomic status, culture, behavior, some physical and mental conditions, genetics and medications.

Table 1. Classification of weight status by BMI for adults

Body Mass Index (BMI)	Weight Status
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.5 to 24.9	Healthy weight
25 to 29.9	Overweight
30 or higher	Obese
30 to 34.9	Class 1 Obesity
35 to 39.9	Class 2 Obesity
40 or higher	Class 3 Obesity

Adapted from cdc.gov/bmi/adult-calculator/bmi-categories.html

How many adults are overweight or obese?

2 out of 3 adults in the US or 67.5% are either overweight or obese.¹

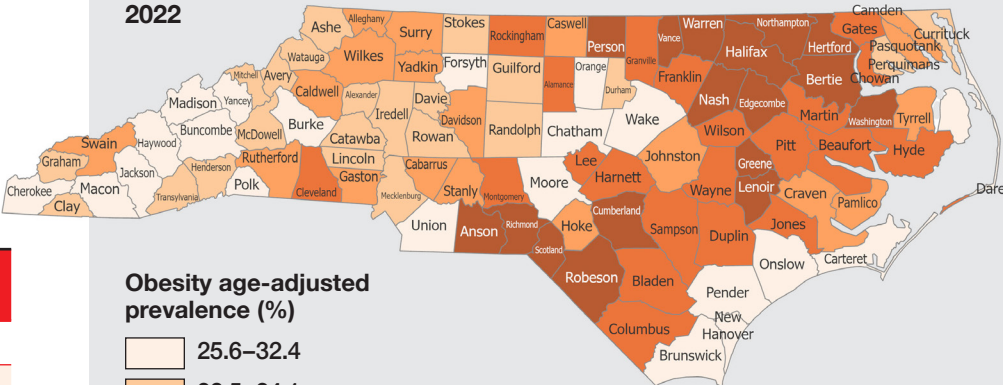
NC has the 27th highest prevalence of obesity among the 48 reporting states and Washington, DC. (Kentucky and Pennsylvania did not report data this year.)²

Over 5 million NC adults or 69% are either overweight or obese.¹

Non-Hispanic African American adults are more likely to be overweight or obese compared to non-Hispanic White adults in North Carolina (77% vs 68%).³

There is geographic variation in the prevalence of overweight and obesity in North Carolina with the eastern part of the state generally having a higher burden (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of Adults 18+ with Obesity in North Carolina, by County 2022



Obesity age-adjusted prevalence (%)

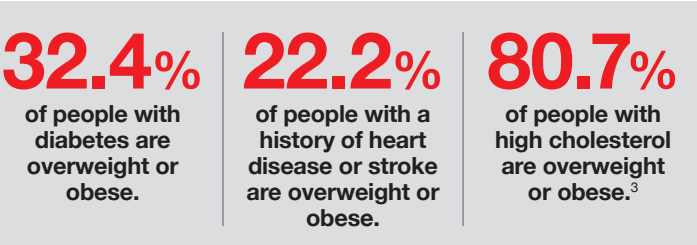
- 25.6–32.4
- 32.5–34.1
- 34.2–37.0
- 37.1–39.4
- 39.5–43.5

Notes: Body mass index is computed as weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared: (kg/m²). BMI is an intermediate variable used in defining overweight and obesity. Obese=BMI 30 or greater.

Data Source: CDC PLACES 2024 Data Release. Division of Population Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA.

What are the complications of obesity?

- Being overweight or obese increases the risk of several conditions including: type 2 diabetes, hypertension (high blood pressure), heart disease and stroke, cancers (e.g., endometrial, breast, colon), dyslipidemia (e.g., high total cholesterol, high levels of triglycerides), gallbladder disease, sleep apnea and breathing problems, osteoarthritis (a degeneration of cartilage and its underlying bone within a joint) and body pain and difficulty with physical functioning.⁴
- Many North Carolinians suffer from complications of overweight and obesity. According to the 2023 NC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) surveys:



- For more data about diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke in North Carolina please visit communityclinicalconnections.com/data.
- For more information about cancer in North Carolina, please visit dph.ncdhhs.gov/programs/chronic-disease-and-injury/cancer-prevention-and-control-branch.

What are the risk factors for overweight and obesity?

- The basic cause of overweight and obesity is calorie (energy) imbalance whereby calorie intake is greater than calorie use. Consequently, diet (calorie intake) and physical activity (calorie use) are major determinants of overweight and obesity.



- Environments that lack places for physical activity or have limited access to healthy food options also contribute to overweight and obesity. For example, an individual's opportunities to consume the recommended daily amounts of fruits and vegetables may be limited because the stores in their community do not sell fruits or vegetables.
- In certain rare disorders, genes can directly cause overweight and obesity. More commonly however, multiple genes may increase one's susceptibility for overweight or obesity but require outside factors, such as excess calorie intake and/or insufficient physical activity, for overweight or obesity to actually develop.
- Some illnesses, such as Cushing's disease and polycystic ovary syndrome, as well as some drugs, such as steroids and antidepressants, may cause weight gain that leads to overweight or obesity.

What options are available to prevent or manage overweight and obesity?

- The main objectives for the management of overweight and obesity are gradual and steady weight loss until a healthy weight is achieved, and thereafter, maintenance of a healthy weight. Even modest weight loss may lead to significant health benefits and the prevention or delay of complications.
- Engaging in regular physical activity (see Table 2 for detailed physical activity guidelines) and maintaining a healthy diet are the underpinnings of any successful weight loss plan. For general information on physical activity, healthy eating and strategies for healthy weight loss, please visit eatsmartmovemorenc.com/myesmm, esmmweighless.com and cdc.gov/healthy-weight-growth/about/index.html.

Table 2: Adult Physical Activity Guidelines

Adults should move more and sit less throughout the day. Some physical activity is better than none. Adults who sit less and do any amount of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity gain some health benefits.
For substantial health benefits, adults should do at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes (1 hour and 15 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity.
For additional and more extensive health benefits, adults should increase their aerobic physical activity to 300 minutes (5 hours) a week of moderate-intensity , or 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity. Additional health benefits are gained by engaging in physical activity beyond this amount.
Adults should also do muscle-strengthening activities that are moderate or high intensity and involve all major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week , as these activities provide additional health benefits.

Source: https://odphp.health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-10/PAG_ExecutiveSummary.pdf

North Carolina's Plan to Address Overweight and Obesity identifies the following core behaviors to reduce overweight and obesity:



Move more.



Eat more healthy food, less junk and fast food.



Eat more fruits and vegetables.



Drink more water, less sugar-sweetened beverages.



Sit less.



Start and continue to breastfeed.



Get enough sleep.



Manage stress.⁵

To learn how strategies related to these behaviors can be applied in eight different community settings, please visit eatsmartmovemorenc.com.

- Creating environments that make it easier to engage in physical activity and healthy eating in community, home, childcare, school, healthcare and workplace settings is a proven strategy in controlling overweight and obesity. To learn more about the North Carolina Division of Public Health's efforts to promote environments that foster physical activity and healthy eating, please visit communityclinicalconnections.com/what-we-do/improve-physical-activity-and-nutrition.
- In some cases, medication and surgical procedures may be needed to complement lifestyle changes for weight loss.
- Individuals on medications or with health conditions that may lead to weight gain should talk to their health care provider about how to best manage their condition and prevent obesity.

REFERENCES

1. National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. *Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity: 2023 Data, Trend and Maps*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved on March 19, 2025, from <https://dnpcr-dtm-cr.services.cdc.gov/?locationId=59>.
2. National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. *2023 Adult Obesity Prevalence Maps*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved on March 19, 2025, from <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data-and-statistics/adult-obesity-prevalence-maps.html>.
3. North Carolina Division of Public Health State Center for Health Statistics. *2023 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)*. NC Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved on March 20, 2025, from <https://schs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/data/brfss/2023>.

4. National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. *Healthy Weight and Growth: How Overweight and Obesity Impacts Your Health*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved on March 20, 2025, from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-weight-growth/food-activity/overweight-obesity-impacts-health.html>.

5. Eat Smart, Move More North Carolina. (2020). *North Carolina's Plan to Address Overweight and Obesity*. Eat Smart, Move More North Carolina, Raleigh, NC. Available at: www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com.

Overall source: Center's for Disease Control, Obesity. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/index.html>.