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BMI of Australian general practice patients

The BEACH program, a continuous national study of general practice activity in Australia, gathers height and weight details of patients at 40% of recorded encounters, enabling their body mass index to be calculated. Details are self reported by the patients, or by their carer in the case of young children, and recorded by the general practitioner at the encounter. This synopsis provides a backdrop against which the articles in this issue of *Australian Family Physician* can be further considered.

Height and weight details were available for 30 476 patients aged 18 years and over at encounters with 948 general practitioners in 2004–2005. More than half the patients were overweight or obese: 34.6% (95% CI: 33.9–35.2) being overweight and 22.4% (95% CI: 21.7–23.1) obese. There were 7.2% of patients underweight and a third had a body mass index (BMI) that was in the normal range (Table 1).

Men were more likely to be overweight or obese (63.3%, 95% CI: 62.2–64.0) than women (52.6%, 95% CI: 51.5–53.6). Overweight/obesity was most prevalent in male patients aged 45–64 years (Figure 1).

Underweight was most prevalent in patients aged 18–24 years (20.2% of women, 9.0% of men) and in patients aged 75 years and over (12.8% of women, 5.4% of men).

BMI of children

The BMI of patients aged less than 18 years was calculated, using the method described by Cole et al,¹ for 3148 patients aged 2–17 years at encounters with 860 GPs. Three in 10 young people (30.2%, 95% CI: 28.3–32.1) were overweight or obese, with 18.1% (95% CI: 16.7–19.4) being overweight and 12.1% (95% CI: 10.7–13.6) obese. There was no difference in prevalence of overweight/obesity between young male

(30.4%, 95% CI: 27.8–32.9) and female patients (30.1%, 95% CI: 27.7–32.5). Figure 2 and 3 show that the age specific rates of obesity follow very similar patterns for both genders.

Changes in overweight/obesity

The prevalence of overweight and obesity in young people has remained steady since 2000–2001, when 17.8% (95% CI: 16.2–19.4) were overweight and 13.6% (95% CI: 11.0–16.2) were obese. Among adult patients there was no change in percentage of overweight from 34.1% (95% CI: 33.4–34.7) in 2000–2001. However, the current prevalence of adult patient obesity is significantly higher than the 20.2% (95% CI: 19.5–20.8) recorded in 2000–2001.

Conflict of interest: none.

Reference

1. Cole TJ, Bellizzi MC, Flegal KM, Dietz WH. Establishing a standard definition for child overweight and obesity worldwide: international survey. *BMJ* 2000;320:1240–3.

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Table 1. Patient BMI (aged 18 years and over)

BMI class	Percent	Male*		Female*			Total respondents		
		95% LCL	95% UCL	Percent	95% LCL	95% UCL	Percent	95% LCL	95% UCL
Obese	21.3	20.4	22.3	23.2	22.4	24.1	22.4	21.7	23.1
Overweight	42.0	41.0	43.0	29.4	28.6	30.1	34.6	33.9	35.2
Normal	32.8	31.7	33.8	37.9	37.0	38.9	35.8	35.0	36.6
Underweight	3.9	3.5	4.3	9.5	9.0	10.0	7.2	6.9	7.6
Total (n, %)	12 288	100.0	-	17 976	100.0	-	30 476	100.0	-

* Patient sex was unknown for 212 respondents Note: LCL=lower confidence limit, UCL=upper confidence limit

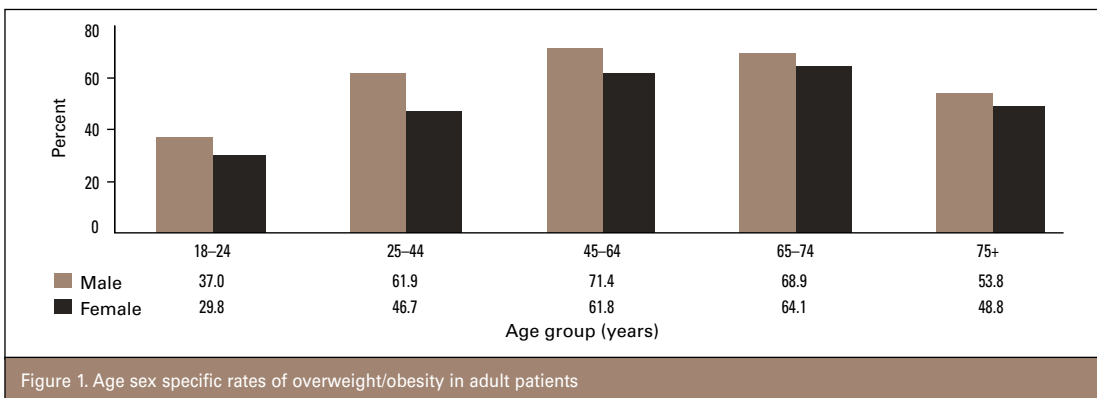


Figure 1. Age sex specific rates of overweight/obesity in adult patients

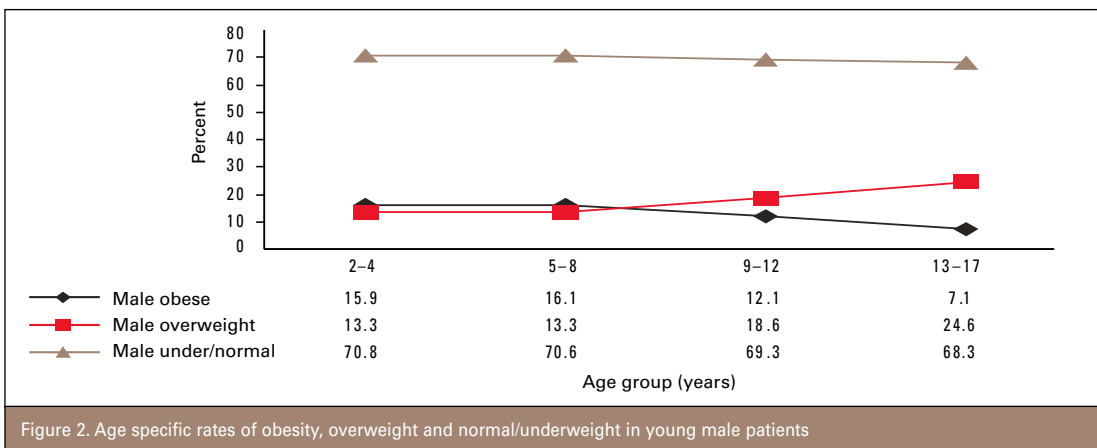


Figure 2. Age specific rates of obesity, overweight and normal/underweight in young male patients

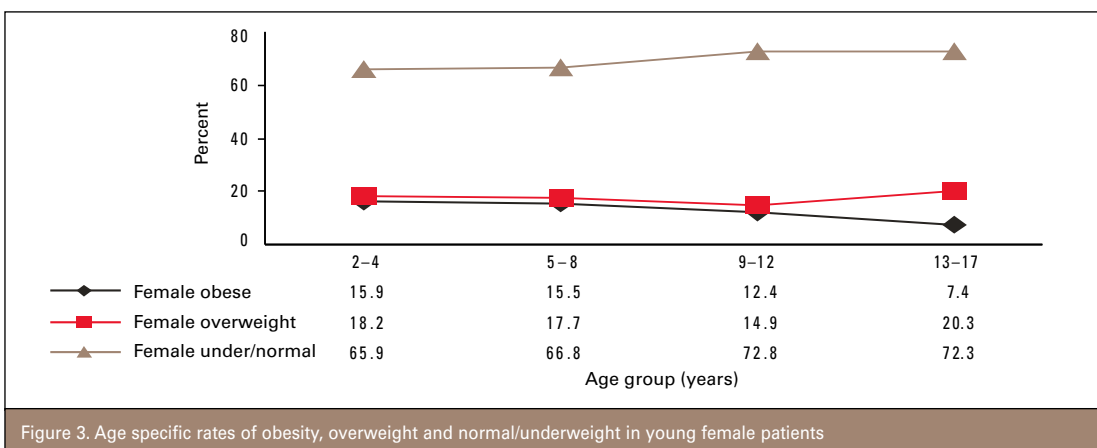


Figure 3. Age specific rates of obesity, overweight and normal/underweight in young female patients