



Excess body weight and cancer key messages

Excess body weight

Excess body weight refers to when a person's Body Mass Index is overweight and above. In Yorkshire, 65.6% of people live with excess body weight, which is above the national average of 64.0%. Also, 27.3% of people in Yorkshire live with obesity alone, compared to 26.0% nationally.

The number of people with excess body weight has been increasing over the last 10 years. If this trend continues on its current course, more than 7 in 10 adults in Yorkshire will live with excess body weight by 2040.

Risk factors for excess body weight

There are multiple factors which impact a person's risk of excess body weight. These include a person's diet and physical activity levels. Some factors are outside of an individual's control, such as their genetics. A person's food environment, or the affordability and accessibility of food and drink products in the area in which they live, is also an important factor.

Excess body weight and cancer

Research has established a link between excess body weight and at least 13 different cancer types. For these cancer types, the risk of cancer is higher for people with excess body weight compared to a healthy weight. This risk increases with the degree of excess body weight. The factors which link excess body weight with cancer include changes in inflammation levels, hormones and insulin levels.

The Yorkshire landscape

Yorkshire has had a higher prevalence of excess body weight than the England average since comparable data began in 2015/16.⁶ Presently in Yorkshire, 65.6% (2 in 3) of adults live with excess body weight, compared to 64.0% in England.

Within Yorkshire, there is variation in the prevalence of excess body weight. In Rotherham, 73.7% of the population live with excess body weight, compared to 62.0% in Sheffield.

Excess body weight and health inequalities

There is a link between socioeconomic deprivation and excess body weight. In Yorkshire and England, people living in more socioeconomically deprived areas are more likely to live with excess body weight.

Unhealthy food and drink products are more affordable and more accessible than healthy choices for people living in deprived areas.

Physical activity levels are lower for children and adults living in the most deprived areas compared to the least. The inequality in physical activity levels among adults has increased since 2015-16.

Policy Recommendations

Yorkshire Cancer Research supports the establishment of a national strategy which makes the prevention of excess body weight a priority. This should balance the food system, so that healthy choices are as equally accessible and affordable for everyone.



As part of this strategy, the charity supports policies including:

- Reporting on the nutritional content of the sales of large food companies should be made mandatory.
- A Sugar and Salt Reformulation Tax should be implemented. Yorkshire Cancer Research supports the proposal of the Government-commissioned National Food

Strategy, which recommended a £3/kg tax on sugar and a £6/kg tax on salt which is used either in processed foods or in restaurants and catering companies.

- Government should invest in making healthier dietary choices more accessible and affordable to the general population, particularly for children and for people from deprived backgrounds.
- To encourage healthier dietary choices, Yorkshire Cancer Research recommends reform to the advertisement and labelling of food products.
- Food education and healthy food choices should be incorporated throughout all of early years, primary and secondary education.
- Government should increase opportunities for physical activity for children.
- A national strategy should have a preventative focus. However, when people living with obesity require treatment, they should receive timely and appropriate levels of care.

