



Obesity Epidemic Grows: Report

By Mikaela Conley

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Despite the bombardment of news about the dangers of obesity and the billions of dollars poured into [healthy choice programs](#), America is getting fatter.

A [new report](#) from Trust for America's Health, a nonpartisan advocacy group, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, found that not one state has reported a decrease in obesity. In fact, adult obesity rates have increased in 16 states in the past year.

"Obesity is one of the most challenging health crises this country has ever faced," said Jeff Levi, executive director of Trust for America's Health. "Twenty years ago, no state had an obesity rate higher than 15 percent. Now, only Colorado is below 20 percent."

In other words, Colorado, which today is the state with the lowest obesity rate, would have had the highest in 1995.

Southern states have the highest rates of obesity, and Mississippi tops the nation's list as the largest state, where 34 percent of the population is obese.

"State by state, obesity rates are unacceptably high," said Dr. Jim Marks, senior vice president of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Along with added pounds, diabetes rates have risen along with America's bulge. In 1995, four states had diabetes rates over 6 percent. Now, 43 states have diabetes rates over 7 percent. Across the country, hypertension rates have risen to more than 20 percent of the total population

The report is based on data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, where people self reported their height and weight. Experts said people tend to underreport their weight, so rates are likely even higher than the data listed in the report.

Levi and Marks did note a "glimmer of hope" within the new statistics: 16 states reported increased rates of obesity, which was down from 28 states that reported increases in 2010. "This provides an encouraging sign that the movement to reverse the obesity epidemic is gathering force," said Marks. "Let me be clear: This is a small victory and it does not mean we can ease off the gas pedal."

Marks and Levi attributed the slowing of obesity to the abundance of federal, state, schools and community programs that have been enacted to try and get communities healthy.

First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! campaign has gained ground across the country by promoting healthy meals in schools and keeping kids active. Farm-to-school programs have been created to promote fresh fruits and vegetables in lunch cafeterias, and some states have even allowed food stamps to stretch further if the person is buying healthier foods.

But Levi and Marks said we still have a long way to go. In the 1970s, only 5 percent of [American children](#) were obese. Today, that percentage has tripled, and even quadrupled in some regions. While the baby boomer population has seen a significant increase in obesity rates, study authors said that generation's obesity, diabetes, and hypertension rates will pale in comparison to the rates in younger generations if this epidemic is not reversed.

"We've got an even larger wave coming in our children unless we can turn that around," said Levi. "I see no reason why we can't go back to where we were."