

# U.S. obesity levels grossly underestimated

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A Harvard study suggests the prevalence of U.S. obesity has been greatly underestimated because people provide false information about themselves.

Harvard School of Public Health researchers analyzed data from state health surveys used to estimate obesity levels. Since people tend to provide incorrect information about their weight and height, especially during telephone surveys, the researchers concluded estimates of obesity in individual states have been more than 50 percent too low.

Obesity is one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality, causing some 2.6 million deaths worldwide each year.

The researchers determined women, on average, tend to underestimate their weight while men do not. However, young and middle-aged men tend to overestimate their height more than women.

The research -- presenting the first-ever corrected estimates of obesity for individual states -- showed the 2002 corrected prevalence of obesity was 28.7 percent for adult men and 34.5 percent for adult women -- more than 50 percent higher than previously estimated.

The study appears in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine.

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