

Two million people eligible for weight loss surgery

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Two million people in England could be eligible for weight loss surgery according to new research published today by *JRSM Open*, the open access companion publication of the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*. The figure far exceeds previous estimates of eligibility. In the first study to quantify the number of people in England eligible for bariatric surgery, researchers from Imperial College London concluded that people fulfilling the national criteria were more likely to be women, retired, have lower educational qualifications and have lower socioeconomic status.

Bariatric surgery – a set of surgical procedures performed on obese people to decrease their stomach size – can greatly reduce the likelihood of death from obesity-related diseases including type 2 diabetes, stroke and [coronary heart disease](#). Recent data show surgery rates have risen year-on-year in England, yet service delivery rates still fall significantly below the level needed to support all those who could potentially benefit.

Dr Sonia Saxena of Imperial College London said: "Despite clear guidelines outlining who can undergo such surgery with the NHS, and evidence that these procedures are cost-effective in the long run, less than one per cent of those eligible have [weight loss surgery](#) each year. This raises questions about why more procedures are not currently being carried out."

The researchers point to several factors that could contribute to low surgery rates. "At the patient level, this study could be consistent with an

inverse care law whereby those most in need of bariatric surgery are in socioeconomic groups who tend to make less use of healthcare services" said Dr Saxena.

"Another barrier might be patient awareness of [bariatric surgery](#) and commitment to complete lifestyle intervention programmes prior to surgery." It has been reported recently that in some areas [weight loss](#) programmes that are a prerequisite to [surgery](#) have been decommissioned due to funding cuts.

Greater investment in service provision may be required as obesity rates continue to rise. Dr Saxena concludes: "Since those eligible are more likely to be of a lower social class and have lower qualifications, resources would need careful allocation to ensure equitable access on the basis of need."

More information: Eligibility for bariatric surgery among adults in England: analysis of a national cross-sectional survey, [DOI: 10.1177/2042533313512479](#)

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