

UK study suggests under 45s and women more likely to gain weight and jump a BMI category during lockdown

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New research being presented at this year's European Congress on Obesity (ECO) in Maastricht, Netherlands (4-7 May), suggests that most adults in the UK did not lose or gain enough weight following the first

pandemic lockdown to change their body mass index (BMI) category, but indicates that young adults (aged 45 years or younger) and women were more likely to gain weight and move up at least one BMI category.

The study, by Professor Thomas Yates and Dr. David Kloecker from the Diabetes Research Center, Leicester General Hospital, University of Leicester, UK and colleagues, included information on a UK sample of approximately a million [adults](#) mostly from England.

"The implications of even modest weight gain at a [population level](#) in younger adults and women could translate into more diabetes, [heart disease](#), cancers and other serious [obesity](#)-related health problems over the coming decades in these populations unless action is taken to reverse the effects of lockdown", says Professor Yates. "These data also suggest societal inequalities, with Black individuals more likely to put on pandemic weight and move up at least one BMI category compared to other [ethnic groups](#)."

Even before the pandemic, obesity was one of the UK's most pressing public health challenges. According to the Health Survey for England, around three-quarters of those aged 45 to 74 years were living with overweight or obesity in 2019.

For this study, researchers conducted a retrospective observational cohort study of one million adults (aged 18 or older), randomly selected from the Clinical Practice Research Datalink (CPRD—a large general practice database) to investigate how BMI and weight changed after the first COVID-19 lockdown in the UK, and whether these changes differed by BMI category, sex, age group and ethnicity.

The pre-lockdown period spanned 22 March, 2017 to 22 March, 2020 (the day before the start of the first lockdown in the UK), and the follow-up lockdown period was from 23 March, 2020 to 13 March, 2021.

In total, 938,150 adults were included in the first analysis comparing body weight trajectories after the lockdown with historical trends. Participants were divided into five groups based on their first recorded BMI measurement prior to lockdown (between 20 March, 2015 and 22 March, 2020)—32% were classed as underweight (BMI of less than 18.5 kg/m²) or healthy weight (BMI 18.5 to less than 25 kg/m²), 35% overweight (BMI 25 to less than 30 kg/m²) and 33% with obesity (either class 1 [30 to ²], class 2 [35 to ²] or class 3 [\geq 40 kg/m²]).

Analyses were conducted for the total cohort and stratified by demographic characteristics: sex (male and female), age (under 45 years old, 45 years to

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