



PRESS RELEASE

Almost a third of people globally have gained weight during pandemic, despite awareness of link between obesity and COVID-19 outcomes.

The implications of COVID on our diet & health.

London, January 20, 2021 — A new global study carried out across 30 countries, looking at the impact of COVID-19 on dietary related health choices, has found that while many are aware of the possible link between obesity and the severity of COVID symptoms, people around the world are gaining weight during the crisis.

- During the pandemic almost a third (31%) of the global population have gained weight.
- Many (45%) believe there is a clear link between obesity and suffering more severe symptoms of COVID-19.
- To reduce the likely severity of coronavirus symptoms, more people would think exercise (38%) would help over losing weight (17%).
- Of the 45% of people trying to lose weight globally, almost two-thirds (62%) are wanting to lose weight not gained during the pandemic and only 15% of those trying to lose weight are doing it to reduce the risk of COVID.

The COVID-19 pandemic has driven weight gain but there is notable variability across the globe.

- Across the 30 countries, a third (31%) of people gained weight since the pandemic began.
- However, the proportion of weight gain varies considerably across countries with more than half of people gaining weight in Chile and Brazil, 30-40% gaining weight in Peru, India, Italy, Saudi Arabia, USA, Spain, South Africa and Turkey. Whereas in China and Hong Kong less than 1 in 10 said that they had gained weight.

A third of the population globally said that they had gained weight during the COVID-19 pandemic and the average weight gain was 6.1kg.

- On average those people who gained weight during the COVID-19 pandemic (31% of the global population) put on an additional 6.1kg. The largest weight gain was seen in Saudi Arabia (average of 8kg for the 35% of the population who gained weight) and Mexico (average of 8.5kg for the 34% who gained weight).

Changes in other lifestyle/health related behaviors have been more subtle and polarised.

- Although globally, over a quarter (27%) did more exercise, 23% did less.
- In line with weight gain more than half of people in China (57%) have done more exercise since the pandemic began however, more than a third of those in Belgium, Chile and Italy exercised less.

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- Globally, 1 in 10 started drinking more alcohol since the start of the pandemic whilst an equal proportion (9%) drank less. However, in the United States of America and Australia about a fifth (20%) of the population drank more alcohol. Whereas, ([possibly due to imposed restrictions](#)) a quarter (24%) of South Africans drank less alcohol.
- Shifts in smoking habits changed by a few percentage points across the globe (4% giving up and 3% taking up smoking). India saw the highest proportion of its population giving up smoking at 12% and Chile had the highest uptake of smoking with 1 in 10 starting picking up the habit during the pandemic.

Nearly half (45%) of the global population believe there is a link between obesity and more severe symptoms of COVID-19 among those infected.

- This figure rises to 8 in 10 in Peru and two-thirds (64%) in Great Britain
- A third (31%) don't believe there to be a link between obesity and more severe symptoms of coronavirus. This is notably so in China where half of the population don't believe in a link (53%), while more than 4 in 10 in Hungary, Italy, South Korea, Malaysia and Poland are also not convinced.

Exercise was thought to be more likely to reduce the risk of severe COVID-19 symptoms (for those who become infected) than giving up smoking, taking vitamin D, losing weight or giving up alcohol.

- Almost 4 in 10 (38%) said that they thought doing regular exercise would reduce the risk of suffering severe COVID-19 symptoms, for those infected with the disease. This compared with almost a third (28%) who said giving up smoking would help and about a quarter (26%) who said taking vitamin D supplements would help. 17% said losing weight and 1 in 10 (9%) said giving up alcohol.
- The potential benefit of exercise was most strongly seen in China where 8 in 10 (78%) people thought it would help lessen the risk of severe COVID-19 symptoms. Many in Hong Kong and India also see the benefits of exercise in avoiding severe coronavirus symptoms (59% and 58% respectively).
- There were significant differences across the globe around the belief that Vitamin D could help with only 1 in 10 people in Japan, Germany and Australia thinking it could help, whereas this percentage was notably higher in Hungary and South Africa where 4 in 10 people thought Vitamin D could help.
- Losing weight was considered to reduce the risk of severe COVID-19 symptoms by only 17% of the global population but this figure is significantly higher in Great Britain where 45% believe losing weight would help and notably higher than the next highest percentage in the Netherlands at 34%.

Many people are trying to lose weight across the globe, but few of these people are specifically looking to lose weight to reduce their risk of COVID-19. This is despite a belief, across many countries, that being overweight can contribute to more severe symptoms of the virus.



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- Globally 45% of people state that they are trying to lose weight.
- Two-thirds (60%) of people in Chile are trying to lose weight and >50% in Spain, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and the USA.
- Of those that are actively looking to lose weight, a third (31%) say they are wanting to lose weight gained during the pandemic but two thirds (62%) are saying they want to lose weight not gained during the pandemic, only 15% are wanting to lose weight to reduce the risk of severe symptoms in the event that they catch COVID-19.
- A third of people in Hungary, Malaysia and Peru are wanting to lose weight specifically to reduce the risk of suffering severe symptoms from COVID-19.
- Within those who are actively trying to lose weight and are doing so to reduce the risk of severe symptoms if they were to get COVID-19, a fifth (19%) say it is their main motivation to lose weight and a further two-thirds (64%) say it is important but not their main motivation.

About the Study

- The data for this research was collected via Ipsos Global Advisor from October 23rd to November 6th, 2020. In total 22,008 interviews were conducted between October 23rd and November 6th 2020 among adult consumers.
- The survey was conducted in 30 markets around the world via the Ipsos Online Panel system: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey and the United States.
- The samples in some markets (e.g., Brazil, mainland China or India) are more urban, more educated, and/or more affluent than the general population. The survey results for such markets should be viewed as reflecting the views of the more “connected” segment of their population.
- The data is weighted so each country’s sample composition best reflects the demographic profile of its adult population according to the most recent census data, and to give each country an equal weight in the total “global” sample.
- Where results do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, multiple responses or the exclusion of don’t knows or not stated responses.
- UK data for Q8 were subject to individual editing decisions.

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