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Two-thirds of people living with obesity blame themselves, despite World Health Organisation classifying obesity as a disease

And on average, at least seven in ten people living with obesity report negative impact across all key aspects of life – reveals 14-country study, released by Ipsos on World Obesity Day 2026

Paris, 4th March 2026 – [Ipsos](#), one of the world's leading market research companies, reveals that two-thirds (66%) of people living with obesity believe their condition is "preventable through personal choices", based on a new study of 14,500 people across 14 countries. This is despite the World Health Organisation classifying obesity as a chronic, relapsing disease**.

The syndicated Global Perceptions of Obesity Study*, which compared perceptions of people living with obesity (3,094) versus people not living with obesity (11,406), also reveals:

Internalised stigma a likely barrier to help-seeking

- **Almost two thirds (63%) of people living with obesity agree that “diet and exercise alone can solve obesity for most people”**, while only half (51%) acknowledge that “genetics and biology are primary causes” – suggesting the majority still feel personally responsible for both the condition and the solution.
- Yet findings highlight a striking contradiction: **Seven in ten (71%) people living with obesity also acknowledge that obesity is “a medical condition requiring ongoing management”** – revealing a challenging disconnect between intellectual understanding and internalised belief.
- This self-blame, and misunderstanding of obesity as a disease, are likely contributing to an apparent reluctance to seek medical help. **More than eight in ten (81%) people living with obesity had tried or been advised to lose weight, but only one in three (35%) had consulted a doctor** about their weight in the past year. They were just as likely to have tried a fad diet (33%).

A chronic disease, still treated as a personal failing

- However, those living with obesity who *had* ever consulted a doctor about their weight reported that **doctors’ recommendations typically focused on lifestyle changes such as eating healthier (60%), exercising more (60%) and eating smaller portions (43%)** – reinforcing the idea that obesity is a matter of

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personal discipline rather than a disease requiring long-term medical management.

Critical blind spots about risk

- The research also highlights blind spots about the impact of obesity on risk of specific diseases. Despite nearly half (48%) of people living with obesity frequently worrying about future health problems, **they also showed limited awareness of obesity's links to type 2 diabetes (53%) and heart disease (52%)**. Only 18% associate obesity with certain cancers.

A hidden toll on everyday life

- **Overall, those living with obesity are 19 percentage points less satisfied with their physical health** than those not living with obesity.
- The study also revealed just how profoundly obesity affects all aspects of daily existence. On average, **at least seven in ten reported that their weight has negatively impacted them in all key life dimensions measured** (see 'About the Research'). This includes professionally ('work/daily life' is impacted for 76%) and in deeply personal ways, such as confidence & self-esteem (85%), emotional & mental wellbeing (83%), and avoidance of social, leisure or romantic activities (70% vs 53% of those not living with obesity).
- Perceived judgement from others compounds the burden. **People living with obesity are more likely than those not living with obesity to frequently feel judged based on how they look (35% vs 24%)**, self-conscious or embarrassed (35% vs 24%) and perceived as lacking self-control or willpower (32% vs 21%).

Roberto Cortese, Head of Ipsos' Obesity & Cardiometabolic Disease Monitors, commented:

"These findings paint a clear picture: people living with obesity are navigating internalised and perceived stigma, misconceptions and knowledge gaps, and a health system that often reinforces outdated beliefs. We need to shift the conversation away from blame and towards understanding. To rethink how society talks about obesity: not as a personal failing, but as a complex chronic disease, deserving of attention, education, empathy and support like any other".

The Ipsos Global Perceptions of Obesity Study report, which includes supporting charts for these findings, can be viewed at <https://www.ipsos.com/en/global-perceptions-of-obesity-study>.

For other study data, available at an additional cost, please visit:

https://ipsosrxinsightstore.com/obesity_cardiometabolic/reports/global_perceptions

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NOTE FOR EDITORS

*ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The Ipsos Global Perceptions of Obesity Study surveyed 14,500 adults across 14 countries: Austria (n=1,000), Brazil (n=1,000), Canada (n=1,000), India (n=2,000), Italy (n=1,000), Mexico (n=1,000), Poland (n=1,000), Romania (n=1,000), Saudi Arabia (n=1,000), South Korea (n=1,000), Spain (n=1,000), Turkey (n=1,000), UAE (n=500) and UK (n=1,000). All findings are based on a 14-country average.

Fieldwork was conducted online by Ipsos from December 2025 to January 2026. The general population sample was structured using quotas for age, gender and region. In most countries, quotas mirror the national population; in some markets, samples may skew slightly toward certain demographics (e.g., younger, urban populations). The sample enables analysis by weight status, with obesity prevalence in each market considered to ensure sufficient base sizes for comparison between people living with obesity and people not living with obesity. Ipsos used height and weight provided by each respondent to analyse the data by those living with obesity and those not living with obesity. The following definitions were used: Living with obesity = BMI 30+ [25+ India, South Korea]; Not living with obesity = BMI <30 [<25 India, South Korea]. Data were not weighted. Please note that obesity prevalence rates within this sample are derived from self-reported data and are intended for comparative analysis of perceptions, not as a substitute for official national epidemiological statistics. Life dimensions referred to are: Physical Health; Emotional & Mental Well-Being; Confidence & Self-Esteem; Social Relationships; Romantic Life; Physical Activity/Fitness; Healthcare Access & Support; Personal Growth; Work/Daily Role; Nutrition & Eating Habits; Everyday Environment; Financial security. All data are ©Ipsos 2026.

**Definition of Obesity – World Health Organisation

Obesity is classified by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a chronic, relapsing disease arising from complex interactions between genetics, neurobiology, eating behaviours, access to healthy diet, market forces, and the broader environment.

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight>

About World Obesity Day

World Obesity Day is observed annually on 4 March, uniting people worldwide to raise awareness of obesity as a complex, chronic disease and to advocate for improved prevention, treatment and support.

www.worldobesityday.org.

Founding Client Disclosure

Eli Lilly is the founding subscriber to the Ipsos Global Perceptions of Obesity Study, an Ipsos syndicated study, and provided funding for the project. As founding subscriber, Eli Lilly had input into the study's overall direction. Ipsos designed and executed the research and analysis independently and retained full editorial control over all final communications. All data is wholly owned by Ipsos and available to multiple clients.

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Ipsos' Obesity Research

Ipsos is committed to advancing understanding of obesity as a global health priority and supports organisations working to improve outcomes for people living with obesity. Global obesity research capabilities include syndicated monitors tracking perceptions and real-world treatment, custom research, market access and advisory services, and custom real-world evidence generation.

ABOUT IPSOS

Ipsos is one of the largest market research and polling companies globally, operating in 90 markets and employing nearly 20,000 people.

Our passionately curious research professionals, analysts and scientists have built unique multi-specialist capabilities that provide true understanding and powerful insights into the actions, opinions and motivations of citizens, consumers, patients, customers or employees. Our 75 business solutions are based on primary data from our surveys, social media monitoring, and qualitative or observational techniques.

“Game Changers” – our tagline – summarizes our ambition to help our 5,000 clients navigate with confidence our rapidly changing world.

Founded in France in 1975, Ipsos has been listed on the Euronext Paris since July 1, 1999. The company is part of the SBF 120, Mid-60 indices and is eligible for the Deferred Settlement Service (SRD).

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