

Americans Are Getting Quite Plump During Lockdown

Analysis by [Dr. Joseph Mercola](#) ✓ Fact Checked

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › More than one group of data revealed that Americans have gained weight during the pandemic, and Millennials may have gained the most
- › In one study, researchers found before gaining weight during lockdown, many were losing weight. Experts are concerned that with continued remote working, the trend may not be easily reversed
- › Maintaining a normal weight and becoming metabolically flexible helps reduce your risk of severe disease from COVID-19, including lowering your risk of death
- › Other consequences of lockdowns include increasing risk of mental health conditions, worse cardiovascular outcomes, financial losses, loss of personal freedom and even poor pet health. Consider these tips to making healthier choices

It was about one year ago, in spring 2020, when the jokes about the “quarantine 15” weight gain began making the rounds.¹ But, one year later, one study² shows that this estimation may be slightly lower than reality.

According to the Trust for America's Health State of Obesity 2020 report,³ 42.4% of U.S. adults are obese, which is the first time the national rate has topped 40%. The data also showed there were 12 states with a rate above 35%.

To put this into perspective, the overall rate has increased 26% from a mere 13 years ago (2008) and in 2012, there was no state with a rate above 35%. Childhood obesity is

also growing, with the latest information showing 19.3% of young people ages 2 to 19 are obese, as compared to 5.5% in the mid-1970s.

Yet, these are only the obesity statistics and do not include the percentage of the population that is also overweight. Data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) showed that there is another 30.7% of adults who are overweight and 9.2% who were severely obese (BMI over 40).⁴ This means that 73.1% of the population is overweight, obese or severely obese.

New data gathered during 2020, reveals these rates may be even higher in the next NHANES survey, increasing the number of people who experience higher risks of cardiovascular disease, **diabetes**, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, mental illness and all-cause mortality.⁵

Americans Gained Weight Steadily During 2020

The results of a small longitudinal cohort study⁶ found participants experienced a consistent weight gain of 0.27 kg (0.59 pounds) every 10 days. The results were gathered from 269 participants in the Health eHeart Study.

They volunteered to report their weight using their Fitbit or iHealth smart scale. The cohort was not fully representative of the general public as they resided in 37 states and the District of Columbia, 48.3% were men, 77% were white, and their mean age was 51.9. At the end of the study, the researchers had 7,444 separate weight measurements spanning February 1, 2020, to June 1, 2020.

This offered data before lockdowns were in place, as well as after. Dr. Gregory Marcus, senior author of the study, expressed concern the trending weight gain, which totaled 1.5 pounds per month, may extend after the lockdown restrictions had ended.⁷

Over the course of one year, this would have totaled 20 pounds. He noted that many of those being tracked had been losing weight prior to the lockdown orders. Speaking to The New York Times, he said:

“It’s reasonable to assume these individuals are more engaged with their health in general, and more disciplined and on top of things. That suggests we could be underestimating – that this is the tip of the iceberg.

We know that weight gain is a public health problem in the U.S. already, so anything making it worse is definitely concerning, and shelter-in-place orders are so ubiquitous that the sheer number of people affected by this makes it extremely relevant.”

Marcus went on to hypothesize that the weight gain was likely related to a lack of physical activity and greater accessibility to food while working at home. Since working remotely may become the new norm after the pandemic is behind us, he suggests a focus on mitigating “work-from-home-related adverse health effects.”⁸

A second survey by the American Psychological Association (APA)⁹ was conducted by the Harris poll, providing data for this year's Stress in America survey. Information was gathered from February 19, 2021, to February 24, 2021, among 3,013 adults over 18 who lived in the U.S.

The data revealed that 61% of the adults surveyed reported experiencing an undesired weight change, either weight gain or loss, since the start of the pandemic. Overall, 42% told the surveyor they had gained more weight than intended, and the average gain was 29 pounds.

When the information was broken out by generation,¹⁰ the results revealed that of those surveyed who reported an undesired weight change, 48% of Millennials had an average gain of 41 pounds. Baby Boomers had reported the least amount gained, 16 pounds, and there wasn't enough sample size of adults over age 76 to report the average amount of unwanted weight gain or loss.

Focus on Health Not Shame

Many health experts are concerned this growing waistline trend will contribute to the rising rates of obesity and health conditions associated with it – including poor

outcomes from a COVID-19 infection. Yet others – including health websites such as Healthline – are encouraging people to accept their new weight and the health risks that go along with it with rationalizations such as:^{11,12}

- Dieting is not without risk as it can lead to eating disorders or nutritional deficiencies
- Your body image struggles are a brain issue, not a body issue
- We need a war on weight stigma, not “obesity”
- You deserve to experience joy at every size – and you can
- You shouldn’t be ashamed of those extra pounds

Weight is a sensitive topic and shame should never be a part of the conversation but, still, while you can’t control the opinion of others and the unreasonable body image promoted by the modeling industry, it’s important instead to focus on your health and wellness.

Dr. Mark Hyman, author and head of strategy and innovation at the Cleveland Clinic Center for Functional Medicine, spoke with ABC News in August 2020, saying:¹³

"There needs to be a massive public health initiative to educate people about the need for improved nutrition in the midst of the pandemic. I think that this is such a critical moment and it's central for us to double down on our nutritional quality in our diet, people are completely neglectful that it is a way of preventing COVID-19."

Unfortunately, there haven’t been governmental initiatives or a focus on nutrition and exercise, both foundational to health and wellness. Instead, the media and agencies have been focused on COVID-19 “cases,” **mask mandates**, social distancing and lockdowns in preparation for **massive vaccination programs**.

Health and wellness have taken a back seat to living through chemistry. The researchers from the study published in JAMA concluded:¹⁴

"It is important to recognize the unintended health consequences SIP [shelter-in-place] can have on a population level. The detrimental health outcomes suggested by these data demonstrate a need to identify concurrent strategies to mitigate weight gain, such as encouraging healthy diets and exploring ways to enhance physical activity, as local governments consider new constraints in response to SARS-CoV-2 and potential future pandemics."

Strategies to Mitigate Weight Gain Also Help COVID Illness

There are specific health conditions that increase your risk of severe COVID-19.¹⁵ Heart disease, obesity, severe obesity, Type 2 diabetes, [high blood pressure](#) and cerebrovascular disease all make the list of health conditions that increase your risk of severe illness from the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Many of these are ameliorated by improving your metabolic inflexibility, which British cardiologist and author Dr. Aseem Malhotra believes is another factor that significantly increases your risk of severe illness. Malhotra recognized a clear link between metabolic inflexibility and worse outcomes from the virus when data were first coming in from China and Italy.

He talked about the [link between insulin resistance and cytokines storms](#) in our interview in October 2020. According to Malhotra, the good news is that these lifestyle factors can be modified in as little as 21 days by simply changing your diet.

This focus has been sorely missed from messaging during the pandemic. The central thesis of his book is we had a pandemic of metabolic inflexibility or metabolic ill-health. There are five primary parameters of metabolic ill health, which include having:

- A large waist circumference
- Prediabetes or Type 2 diabetes
- Prehypertension or hypertension (high blood pressure)
- High blood triglycerides

- Low HDL cholesterol

As we discussed in the interview in the link above, Malhotra has found from the data that metabolic syndrome can as much as triple the risk of fatality from COVID-19. The knowledge that weight gain and the health conditions associated with it are dangerous and increase the risk of severe COVID has made mainstream media news.

Yet, it is obvious that much of the focus is on surveillance and behavioral control. In response to the overwhelming attention on vaccinations instead of healthy lifestyle choices, Russian lawyer Jenia Finegan commented on Twitter in March:¹⁶

"If this is the case, should we not have mandatory weight passports? Mandatory exercise and compulsory weight management programmes? Close all fast food outlets? No job for those refusing to lose weight? What else?"

Weight Gain Is Only One Consequence of Lockdown Orders

The [global lockdown](#) was reportedly initiated to protect the general public, and yet experts agree that this policy may well have been one of the biggest public health mistakes ever made.¹⁷ Thousands of doctors, concerned citizens and scientists have grave concerns over the damaging mental health and physical health impacts from mask mandates and lockdowns.¹⁸

Many are calling for focused protection, as communicated in the Great Berrington Declaration. As of March 26, 2021, 42,059 medical practitioners and 767,577 concerned citizens have signed the declaration.¹⁹

The authors note worse cardiovascular disease outcomes, [deteriorating mental health](#) and fewer cancer screenings²⁰ as some of the health concerns arising from lockdown policies that are producing devastating effects on public health.

Lockdowns in New Zealand have cost the country at least \$10 billion without reducing the number of deaths.²¹ An analysis²² of nonpharmaceutical interventions, including business closures and mandatory stay-at-home orders in 10 countries, revealed there

was no clear significant beneficial effect in countries where more restrictive policies were used as compared to those with less restrictive policies.

Another consequence of the pandemic has been a **loss of personal freedom**. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention inflated the mortality statistics by 1,670%,^{23,24} which has likely contributed to the growing fear and increasing compliance of society to accept less personal freedom and more surveillance as the “new normal.”

Lockdowns have even taken a toll on pet eating habits and activity levels, which in turn has resulted in a higher number of overweight and obese dogs and cats. According to one study,²⁵ “more than 71% of pet professionals say the pandemic has impacted the way pets eat.”

The survey also showed that 33% of pet owners said their pet became overweight during 2020. Most likely, the weight gain was a result of pet parents spoiling their pets, giving treats more often as a form of love. Pictures of morbidly obese dogs have also made the news.²⁶ One commenter said:²⁷

"I managed to avoid weight gain, but my pets did not. Instead of reaching for a snack every time I went into the kitchen, apparently, I was always reaching for a cat treat ... Ever try to put 3 20-pound cats on a diet?"

Consider These Tips to Eat Healthy and Start Moving

The pandemic and subsequent lockdown changed many people's activity levels. While it may not have seemed like much, walking up and down the stairs, going to meetings and grabbing coffee with a friend all meant being slightly more active than sitting in front of a computer at home all day.

Even those small steps can add up to big results. Added to a lack of activity, is a rising level of anxiety, greater access to food just steps away in the kitchen and increasing boredom.

If you need to lose weight, I recommend adopting a **cyclical ketogenic diet**, which involves radically limiting carbs (replacing them with healthy fats and moderate amounts of protein) until you're close to or at your ideal weight, ultimately allowing your body to burn fat – not carbohydrates – as its primary fuel.

This includes avoiding all **ultraprocessed foods** and also limiting added sugars to a maximum of 25 grams per day (15 grams a day if you're insulin resistant or diabetic). **KetoFasting**, the program I developed and detail in my book, "**KetoFast: A Step-By-Step Guide to Timing Your Ketogenic Meals**," combines a cyclical ketogenic diet and intermittent fasting with cyclical partial fasting to optimize weight, health and longevity.

In addition, each of the factors below can contribute to eating just a little bit more and moving just a little bit less. Consider using the accompanying tips to begin making healthier choices.

- **Create a daily routine** – It's important to get up at the same time each morning, and work to get seven to nine hours of **quality sleep** each night. Plan your meals for the day, including the timing of your meals and any healthy snacks, and get dressed every day.

Loose fitting sweats or shorts make it easier to ignore weight gain. Include exercise in your daily routine and avoid sitting for long periods. If you work at a computer, stand instead of sitting for the majority of your day. If your favorite gym is closed, consider other forms of activity like walking, hiking, biking, dancing or an exercise tape.

Incorporate the **Nitric Oxide Dump** two to three times a day to raise your activity level and take advantage of the extra nitric oxide released during the short routine.

- **Manage your stress** – Unfortunately, many use food as comfort during times of stress. This only increases the difficulty in maintaining a healthy weight. Instead, consider exercise, yoga, meditation, connecting with friends or **Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT)**. You'll find a library of demonstrations at this link, including EFT for stress and anxiety.

- **Be mindful** – It's easy to overeat and over snack when you're watching television or visiting with friends. Avoid eating or grabbing a snack while you're driving, watching television or working. When you're busy, it's also easy to underestimate how much you're eating each day.
- **Change your routine** – Steer clear of settings or situations you associate with overeating. After a stress-filled day, avoid the gallon of ice cream in the freezer or the six-pack in the refrigerator. Instead, consider meditating, a soak in a hot tub or a walk with the dog.

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