

1 How Obese is the Thai Population?

More than one third of Thais are overweight and one tenth are obese.

Over the past two decades (1991–2009) the proportion of overweight and obese Thais over 15 years of age has doubled (from 17.2% to 34.7%) and tripled (from 3.2% to 9.1%) respectively. Over-nutrition, especially amongst pre-school and school children, must be a health priority in which all sectors increasingly should become aware of and collaborate together to resolve.

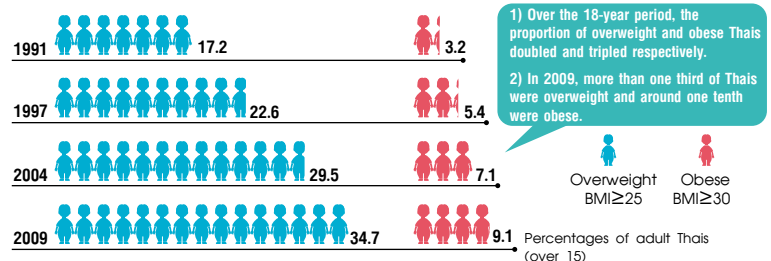
Overweightness and obesity can be easily assessed with the Body Mass Index (BMI). BMI is calculated by dividing body weight (kg) with body height (m) squared. One is considered overweight when the BMI is greater than 25 kg/m² and obese when the BMI exceeds 30 kg/m². In addition, one is considered to have “metabolic syndrome” if the waistline exceeds 90 cm (male) and 80 cm (female).

How to identify obesity and “metabolic syndrome”

Body weight criteria	International criteria	Asia-Pacific criteria
	BMI (kg/m ²)	
Underweight	< 18.5	< 18.5
Normal	18.5-24.99	18.5-22.99
Overweight	≥ 25	≥ 23
Borderline obese	25-29.99	23-24.99
Obese	≥ Over 30	≥ Over 25
Waistline criteria	Waistline (cm)	
	International criteria	Asia-Pacific criteria
Metabolic syndrome (male)	≥ 101	≥ 90
Metabolic syndrome (female)	≥ 88	≥ 80

Source: National Health Survey Office. Report of the 4th National Health Examination Survey (2008-2009)

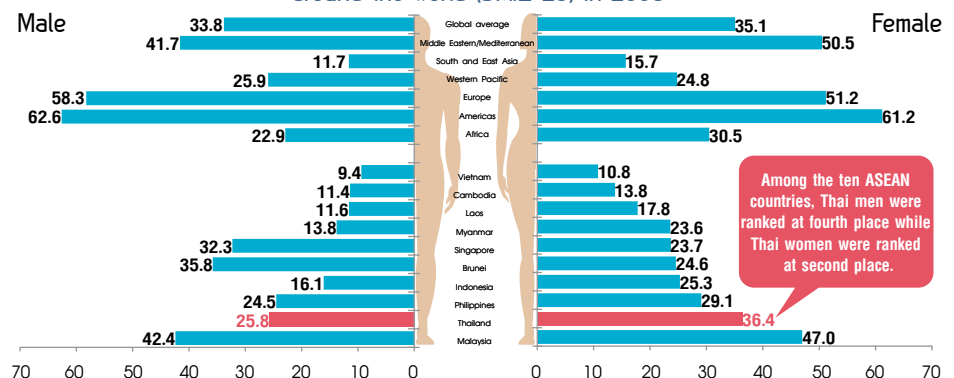
Proportion of overweight and obese Thais markedly increased between 1991 and 2009



Source: National Health Survey Office. Health Signs Newsletter, January 2011, quoting data from the report of the 4th National Health Examination Survey (2008-2009)

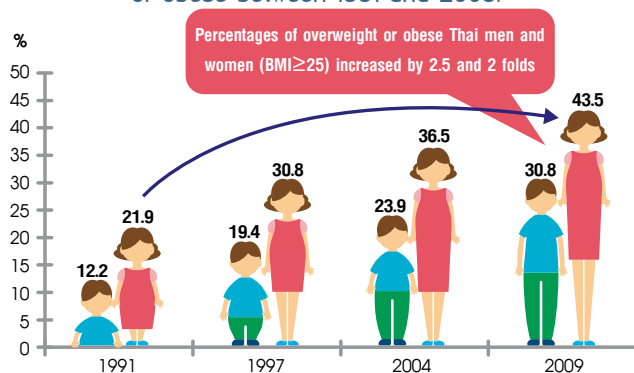
Obesity appears to follow a country's development level and quality of life. The prevalence of overweightness and obesity in Thailand is rising fast with Thai women faring worse than their male counterparts in almost all indicators.

Percentage of overweight or obese populations (over 20 years old) around the world (BMI ≥ 25) in 2008



Note: age-standardised estimation
Source: WHO, World Health Statistics 2013.

Thai men and women became more overweight or obese between 1991 and 2009.



Note: Only 18-59 age group

Source: National Health Survey Office. Report of the 1st - 4th National Health Examination Surveys

Thai women are doing worse than Thai men in all indicators

2009	Men	Women	Total
Average BMI (kg/m ²)	23.1	24.4	23.8
Prevalence of overweightness (%)	28.4	40.7	34.7
Prevalence of obesity (%)	6.0	11.6	9.1
Average waistline (cm)	79.9	79.1	79.5
Prevalence of metabolic syndrome (%) (Waistline over 90cm in men and 80 cm in women)	18.6	45.0	32.1

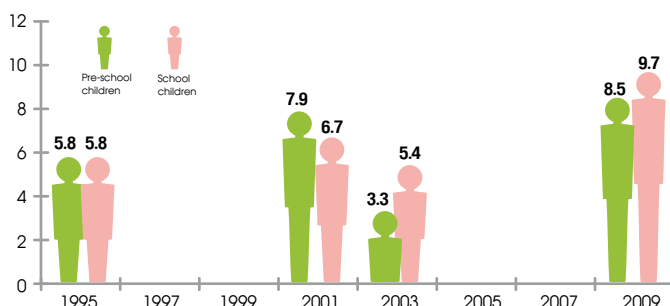
Note: Only those over 15 years old

Source: National Health Survey Office. Report of the 4th National Health Examination Survey

Compared to other countries in the region, Thais are the second most obese population in ASEAN after Malaysia, ranking at fourth place and second place for males and females respectively.

Most worrying is the rising trend of child obesity. The 2009 survey reveals how around one tenth of Thai pre-school (1-5 years) and school (6-14 years) children were overweight or obese. If Thai society fails to recognise and solve this situation, these children will become overweight and obese adults, thereby intensifying the negative impact of obesity on the future of the country.

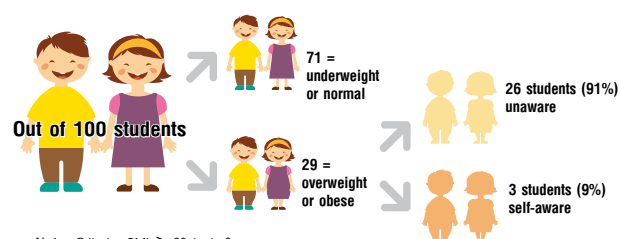
Overweightness and obesity among Thai children, 1995-2009



Note: Preschool children = 1-5 years; school children = 6-14 years. Data from the 2nd National Health Examination Survey, 1995; Project on Holistic Development among Thai Children, 2001; the 5th Food and Nutrition Survey, 2003.

Source: Ladda Mo-suwan, in Report of the 4th National Health Examination Survey, 2008-2009, "Children" section.

Overweightness and obesity among university graduates in seven universities in Chiangmai Province.



Note: Criteria: BMI ≥ 23 kg/m²

Source: Wannapa Lekuthai et al, 2011.

In addition, many Thais are unaware that they are overweight or obese. Self-awareness is an important first step which leads to individual-level behavioural changes to reduce obesity. However, awareness needs to be coupled with policies and measures to curb obesity at the public-level with collaboration from all sectors.

