

## Obesity and Overweight<sup>1</sup> in Alabama<sup>2</sup>

The United States has the highest percentage of obese people in the world. Alabama, with 24.5 percent of adults obese, is among the top seven states in the nation. Alabama has an additional 37.2 percent who are overweight. Obesity and overweight together make a crucial public health impact.

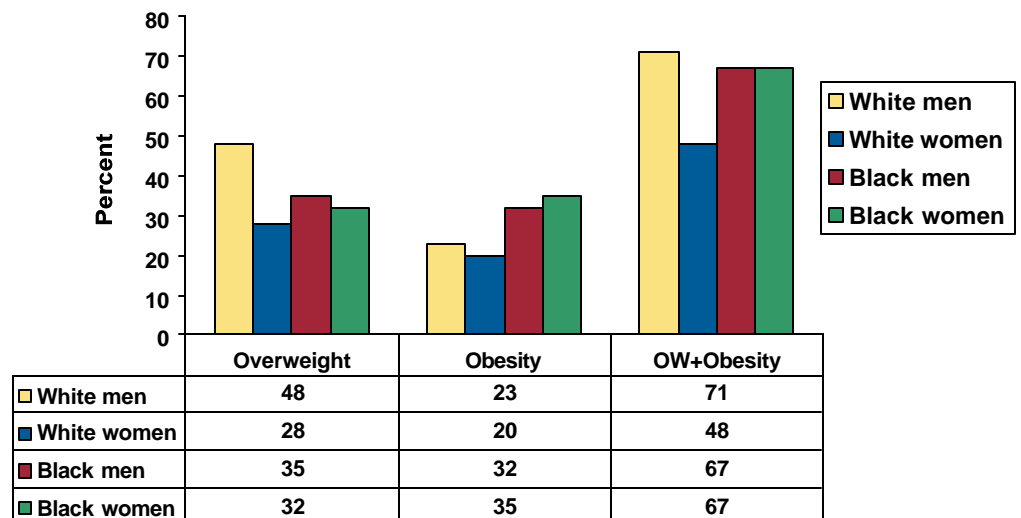
### Medical problems related to excess body fat are

- insulin resistance
- type 2 diabetes
- hypertension
- cardiovascular disease
- stroke
- sleep apnea
- gallbladder disease
- gout
- osteoarthritis
- colorectal and prostate cancer in men
- endometrial, breast and gallbladder cancer in women
- infertility
- depression
- complications from pregnancy
- hormone abnormalities

Both obesity and overweight have a strong relationship to heart disease, stroke, diabetes and other chronic diseases (see box).<sup>3</sup> In fact, 9.6 percent of Alabamians are estimated to have diabetes, the highest rate in the nation. In the US, approximately 300,000 deaths per year are associated with overweight and obesity.<sup>4</sup> The Alabama age-adjusted death rate rankings for obesity-related diseases are among the highest in the nation: 5<sup>th</sup> for heart disease, 7<sup>th</sup> for stroke, and 10<sup>th</sup> for diabetes.<sup>5</sup> Left unabated, overweight and obesity will cause as much preventable disease and death as cigarette smoking.<sup>4</sup> The estimated direct and indirect costs of obesity and being overweight in the US are \$117 billion and rising rapidly. This figure exceeds even the annual costs of tobacco-related illnesses.<sup>6</sup>

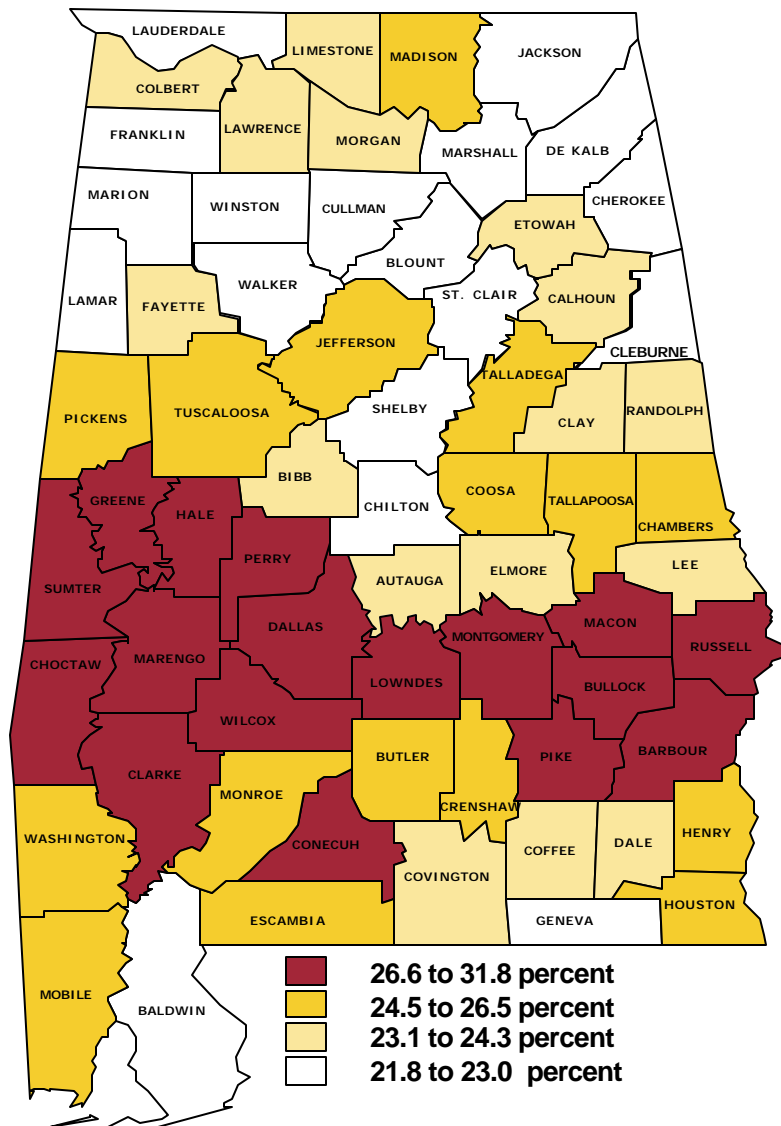
Obesity is related to socioeconomic factors. The amount of food eaten and the amount of physical activity have strong cultural and behavioral components. By race and sex, the graph shows white males have the highest percentage of overweight in Alabama, while black Alabamians have the highest percentage of obesity.

**Percent of Overweight and/or Obese Adults  
Alabama Respondents, BRFSS 2001**



Income levels also affect obesity. In Alabama, the prevalence of obesity among persons with annual incomes at or below \$15,000 was 30.9 percent. In comparison, for persons with incomes at or above \$75,000, 20.8 percent were obese. Obesity occurred in 26.3 percent of adults with less than a high school education, compared to 18.5 percent among college graduates. Clearly the most severe burden is among blacks and those with the least income and education. Geographically, counties in the lower third of the state are more likely to have high percentages of adults at risk for obesity and obesity-related health problems.

### Estimated Number of People at Risk for Obesity among Alabama Adults Aged 18 and Older Based on Distribution by Age, Race, and Sex and Assigned Risk from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Data, Alabama 2000



<sup>1</sup> Obesity is defined as a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher. Overweight is defined as a BMI of 25 to 29.  
<sup>2</sup> Data for this report were taken from Alabama's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), a survey of adults 18 and older.  
<sup>3</sup> Khaodhiar, L. McCowen, K. and Blackburn, G. Obesity and its comorbid conditions. *Clinical Cornerstone* 2(3):17-31, 1999  
<sup>4</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. The Surgeon General's call to action to prevent and decrease overweight and obesity. [Rockville, MD]:U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General; [2001]. Available from: U.S. GPO, Washington.  
<sup>5</sup> Minino AM, Arias E, Kochanek KD, Murphy SL, Smith BL, Deaths: Final data for 2000. National Vital Statistics Report. 50(15) Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. 2002.  
<sup>6</sup> American Public Health Association. Obesity at a glance. Found 4/16/2003 [www.apha.org/nphw/facts/obesity\\_facts.htm](http://www.apha.org/nphw/facts/obesity_facts.htm).