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# THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

Approximately 1.6 billion of the planet's population are now overweight. Below, a guide to the countries helping to tip the scales

**America (70.8 per cent overweight)** According to a study from Yale University, five per cent of Americans would rather lose a limb than be obese. The majority, however, don't appear to have a choice, and their country is becoming increasingly adept at making life comfortable for them. Boston Emergency Services in 2011 unveiled an ambulance for the obese. The vehicle is equipped with a stretcher that can hold 850lb and a hydraulic lift with a 1,000lb capacity to ensure the safety of the sick and stem back injuries among crews hoisting hefty patients. Brylcreme Home, a US retailer, offers an extensive selection of extra-wide and reinforced chairs, along with high-capacity scales and extra-large "Big John" loo seats. Police officers are now trained how to body search obese suspects "up in the folds". The obese even have their own advocacy group, the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, whose recent objections to an "offensive" Disneyland exhibit on childhood obesity led to its closure.

**Australia (63.7 per cent overweight)** Royal Adelaide Hospital recently announced a refurbishment to help staff cope with an influx of obese patients: bigger rooms with ceiling-mounted lifting apparatus, reinforced wheelchairs and beds, and larger CAT scanning machines. Staff are 19 times more likely to strain themselves moving obese patients than others.

**Brazil (51.7 per cent overweight)** Along with an expanding economy comes expanding waistlines. Brazil is currently on track to be as obese as the US by 2022. Brazilians' natural sweet tooth certainly doesn't help – they lather sugar on already-sweet fruits like pineapple, and *cafézinho*, the national espresso-like coffee, is more sugar than liquid – and nor do their ideas on body image. As one commentator put it: "American men may focus on breasts, but the Brazilian man has always wanted something to grab on to."

**China (24.5 per cent overweight)** More than 325 million Chinese are now overweight or obese, a figure that could double in the next two decades. Fitness and slimming is a £700million industry. Sales of weight-loss teas are rising sharply, and traditional Chinese treatments like acupuncture and fire-cupping are more popular than ever. Not that this makes things any easier for a Western brand like Weight Watchers, which has great difficulty assigning nutritional "points" to dishes like "desert boat sails on green" (camel's foot simmered with hearts of rape).

**Colombia (48.3 per cent overweight)** Perhaps the most exercise-friendly country in the world. Every Sunday morning in Bogotá, the roads are closed to cars to allow free reign for cyclists, roller bladers and joggers to safely exercise across the 120km of the *ciclovía*.

**Finland (58 per cent overweight)** 72 per cent of the country exercises regularly, helped by a government initiative that awards cash prizes to towns that lose the most weight. As part of the same programme, the Finnish government also encouraged shoe companies to make non-slip soles standard, so people wouldn't be deterred from walking in icy weather.

**France (50.7 per cent overweight)** Contrary to the bestselling book, French women do get fat. Weight Watchers and Jenny Craig weight loss centres are signing new members in France in far greater numbers than in

**Most fattening national dish**  
Poutine, a Canadian side dish of fries, cheese and gravy.  
1,500 calories

**\$142 billion**  
Amount Americans spend on fast food each year

**£37 million**  
The amount spent annually on unused gym subscriptions in Britain

**Europe's laziest nations**  
Greece and Italy – only 3% exercise regularly

**30%**  
Proportion of the Arab world that is now overweight

**Coca-Cola**  
is sold in every country in the world, except for North Korea

## PROOF THAT PORTIONS ARE GETTING BIGGER

A team from Cornell University studied 52 paintings of the Last Supper made over the past 1,000 years and established that over that time, the size of the meal depicted had grown by 69 per cent; bread size alone grew by around 23 per cent. "We think that as art imitates life, these changes have been reflected in paintings of history's most famous dinner," said research leader Professor Brian Wansink

other markets, and offer such Gallic advice as "remember to have either dessert or cheese – but not both".

**Jamaica (55.3 per cent overweight)** In Jamaican culture, a skinny – or "meagre" – woman is considered unattractive, while heaviness is a sign of happiness and social harmony. Which is why many women bulk up with black-market "chicken pills", i.e. chicken feed with appetite-boosting arsenic. Side effects include diarrhoea, dermatitis and – eventually – cancer.

**Malaysia (44.2 per cent overweight)** Schoolchildren have had their body mass index printed on their report cards since 2011, to help parents keep track of their children's weight.

**Mauritania (36 per cent overweight)** A local saying goes, "The glory of a man is measured by the fatness of his woman." A third of women over 40 have said they were force-fed as children, to fall into local standards of beauty. The process is called *gavage*, a French word that describes the fattening up of geese to produce foie gras. A quarter of the 1.5 million women in the country are obese, contrasting sharply with most sub-Saharan countries. The government ran a television and radio campaign highlighting the health risks of obesity; because most Mauritanian love songs describe the ideal woman as fat, the health ministry commissioned catchy odes to thin women.

**Mexico (68.1 per cent overweight)** Since 1980, the percentage of overweight or obese Mexicans has tripled,

and diabetes has become the leading cause of death. In some areas of the country, it's easier to get a soft drink than a clean glass of water. The vast majority of Mexico City's public schools, and many private schools, lack drinkable water; the consumption of soft drinks has increased 60 per cent over the past 14 years. Mexicans drink the most Coca-Cola per capita in the world. Since it enacted the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, imports of processed food and drinks have soared. The average Mexican eats 433lb of bakery goods per year, compared with only 156lb of vegetables.

**Nauru (94.5 per cent overweight)** A 21 sq m island in the Pacific that qualifies as the world's fattest nation, Nauru's life expectancy for men is 59 years old and for women 64 years old. Phosphate mining, long a source of wealth, has left the island virtually incapable of growing vegetables. So islanders rely on processed Western imports – and a lot of them. "People [in Nauru] might only eat once a day," says Professor Clive Moore of the University of Queensland, "but the plate could be 4in high." As part of a recent government initiative, every Wednesday locals are encouraged to walk around the three-mile airport perimeter, but it's an uphill struggle. The islanders have, says Professor Moore, "a biological propensity to gain weight".

**Nigeria (26.8 per cent overweight)** "Fattening rooms", where women are encouraged to eat large amounts throughout the day, are popular in Nigeria, especially before weddings. A key ingredient is *garri*, a porridge made from cassava tubers.

## \$275 MILLION

The cost, since 2000, to airlines of fuel to compensate for the additional weight of their passengers (350 million gallons). Earlier this year, a former Qantas executive called for the introduction of "excess weight" charges, because "the average adult passenger is carrying a bit more heft"

Compiled by Horatia Harrod and Fred Mitting

**Qatar (72.3 per cent overweight)** With a GDP of \$181.7 billion and a population of just under two million, per capita, Qatar is the richest nation on Earth. And it's fast becoming the fattest, too. Sweltering temperatures of up to 41C make walking – or any kind of outdoor activity – unbearable. Social and family life revolves around five large meals, interspersed with snacks of tea and cake. The final meal of the day invariably comes from McDonald's – delivered, of course. It's predicted that within five years, 73 per cent of Qatari women and 69 per cent of the men will qualify as obese.

**Saudi Arabia (69 per cent overweight)** Girls are banned from participating in sports in Saudi state schools. The stance of the official Supreme Council of Religious Scholars is best summed up by Sheikh Abdullah al-Manee, who said in 2009 that the excessive "movement and jumping" needed in football and basketball might cause girls to tear their hymens and lose their virginity. One third of women in Saudi Arabia are obese.

**Sweden (53.3 per cent overweight)** Obesity is on the rise in Sweden, but at a markedly slower rate than in other countries. In fact, the Swedes are now on track to overtake the Swiss as Europe's slimmest people, thanks to a recent craze for high-fat, low-carb dieting. Endorsed by health authorities in 2008, the diet is now followed by one in four Swedes and its popularity was partly to blame for neighbouring Norway's Great Butter Shortage of 2011. (Several resourceful Swedes were arrested attempting to smuggle butter across the border.)

**Tonga (90.8 per cent overweight)** Poor health and obesity are blamed on imported food like Spam, corned beef and "turkey tails" (a ban on the latter was recently lifted to ease membership of the World Trade Organisation). Tonga's late king, Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, who died in 2006, was once the world's heaviest monarch, weighing 440lb. He tried to persuade Tongans to get fit by offering cash incentives and taking up – in his seventies – bicycle rides around the island. (He shed 154lb.)

**UAE (68.3 per cent overweight)** When the UAE football team failed to qualify for the 2010 World Cup, defender Saleh Obaid blamed the team's addiction to fast food. "We eat from McDonald's. Everyone eats from McDonald's. No good food." McDonald's was a sponsor of the 2010 World Cup.

**UK (64.2 per cent overweight)** Despite the Government's three-year-old Change4Life campaign (latest recruit, television chef Ainsley Harriott) and Health Secretary Andrew Lansley's call for the population to cut 5 billion calories from its diet, obesity in the UK is getting worse. It causes an estimated 9,000 premature deaths a year, and if current trends continue, 90 per cent of British children will be obese by 2050.

**Zimbabwe (25.5 per cent overweight)** In 2004, the Zimbabwean government came up with what they called the "Obesity Tourism Strategy". As Zimbabweans starve, overweight tourists would be encouraged to visit the country and work on farms seized from white farmers, losing weight in the process. "Tour organisers may promote this programme internationally and bring in tourists, while agriculturalists can employ the tourists as free farm labour. The tourists can then top it all by flaunting their slim bodies on a sundowner cruise."