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Report: New York Ranks 41st in Nation for Adult Obesity Rates

About 24 percent of New Yorkers are considered obese. Despite many favorable socioeconomic factors, obesity rates in Westchester, Putnam and Rockland counties mirror state levels.

By [Jaclyn Bruntfield](#) | [Email the author](#) | July 9, 2011 | [Print](#)

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New York ranks 41st in the nation for adult obesity rates, according to a report released last week. The report, entitled "[F as in Fat: How Obesity Threatens America's Future 2011](#)" was released by the Trust for America's Health (TFAH) and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

"Today, the state with the lowest obesity rate would have had the highest rate in 1995," said Jeff Levi, Ph.D., executive director of TFAH. "There was a clear tipping point in our national weight gain over the last twenty years, and we can't afford to ignore the impact obesity has on our health and corresponding health care spending."

New York's adult obesity rate was 24.7 percent, a 10.4 percent increase from its 1995 levels. The state with the highest obesity rate was Mississippi at 34.4 percent and Colorado ranked 50th. No state saw a decrease in obesity rates.

An individual is considered obese if his or her Body Mass Index (BMI), calculated using height and weight, is above 30 and overweight at 25 to 29.9. Researchers compiled statistics from the Centers for Disease control from 2008 - 2010.

While New York's ranking was comparatively low, the obesity crisis still hits home here. According to statistics compiled by the New York State Department of Health, 59 percent of residents were overweight or obese in 2008 - 2009. Rates in Westchester, Putnam and Rockland counties each mirrored New York's at between 58 and 60 percent.

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In April, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation released a report in conjunction with the University of Wisconsin called "County Health Rankings," which ranked Westchester, Putnam and Rockland in the top 10 healthiest counties in New York. The rankings were based on health factors such as education, environment, income and disease rates. Putnam County ranked first in New York.

While the data for these counties is favorable by comparison, public policy has been aimed at targeting lifestyle choices associated with high obesity rates. The Putnam County Department of Health launched a "Live Healthy Putnam" campaign in 2009 that supports a voluntary ban on trans fats in restaurants. In 2010, the initiative solicited responses from 600 residents on eating and activity habits.

"The data is now being used to decide how to best meet the needs of the county in preventing obesity and chronic disease," the department said in a statement.

The Westchester and Rockland departments of health also offer nutritional and activity guidance on their websites. Westchester County launched the Healthy Heart Program this year, and encourages childhood exercise through the Fit Kids Challenge.

In February, Rockland County received a \$1.5 million, five-year state grant to create programs to curb obesity and related diseases.

"This grant will allow us to work in both community and work site settings to develop plans and actions that improve access to healthier food choices and physical activity," said Dr. Joan Facelle, Rockland County Commissioner of Health.

The program, called Creating Healthy Places to Live, Work and Play, focuses on initiatives such as developing farmers markets, promoting fitness in child care facilities and improving hiking and biking trails in low-income, densely populated communities of Monsey, Haverstraw, West Haverstraw and Spring Valley.

Facelle said that while public policy can be a good incentive to help people make lifestyle changes, those changes can nevertheless be difficult.

"Before this job I was a pediatrician. I think it's key to instill healthy habits early in life. It's harder when bad habits are entrenched. Yet we've seen with policies that make it easier to be healthy that improvements are made. We're hoping to promote a change in community culture."

Jeff Castaldo, owner of Nyack Fitness, works with clients looking to adopt healthier lifestyle choices. He says that people are often sent mixed messages when it comes to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

"People just don't understand what to eat and how to exercise," he said. "When people come to me, 90 percent of the time they're confused about food, nutrition and exercise. They go to places like Starbucks and get a large drink and think it's okay because it's fat-free."

"The marketing of other things has turned people away from fruits and vegetables," he said. "Somewhere in the media, clients get the idea that calories are important. My belief is that calories aren't important unless you're eating cake."

Castaldo encourages his clients to incorporate more fruits and vegetables into their diets and to engage in vigorous physical activity such as sprinting and lifting weights. He said clients can often be seen outside of his business throwing tires for exercise.

Elizabeth DeRobertis, MS, RD, CDN, CDE, of Scarsdale Medical Nutrition and Diabetes Center says that doctors play a critical role in convincing people to lose weight.

"Studies support that patients are motivated into action when physicians tell them to do something," she said. "We started an initiative here where we have three dieticians and every doctor on board documenting patients' weights and talking to them about weight loss."

Like Castaldo, DeRobertis places emphasis on eating more fruits and vegetables.

"People are so focused on what they should be eating less of and cutting out, but the entire produce section is entirely free of calories. If they focused on what they should be eating more of, it would end up pushing out those extra calories," she said.

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[Elizabeth DeRobertis](#)

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Good article, and just to clarify, the produce section isn't entirely free of calories, but free in terms of how much we can eat because fruits and vegetables are so low in calories and high in nutrients!

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New Yorkers just love to eat. My addiction is soda.
I will drink a 20oz bottle right now.

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I just ate a ton of Taco Bell =[

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sometimes people bite off more than they can chew, without any idea of what they're eating. Not at healthy. Gotta know when to quit, If they keep eating they're sure to be very sick.

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That's very true. Of course I don't need to eat to be very sick because it comes to me naturally.

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this is most evident.

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kitchen's closed. No more soup for you. Poor Mortimer Snerd, forever a tiny spectator and always two steps behind.

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you will be left now, to continue feeding on yourself.

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