

**The American Profile:  
Weight Gained Over the Last 20 Years**

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[www.americashealthrankings.org/spotlight.aspx](http://www.americashealthrankings.org/spotlight.aspx)

Every day, we hear that Americans are becoming more obese; now the number of obese individuals exceeds one in four people. But what does this mean for our figures? For our individual weight gain? After all, we get on a scale that reads in pounds, not in obesity.

Obesity is measured by the Body Mass Index (BMI). BMI is equal to your weight in pounds divided by your height in inches squared and then multiplied by 703. CDC has a calculator for BMI at <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/calc-bmi.htm>. BMI and weight status is illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Body Mass Index (BMI)

BMI	Weight Status	Examples (adult weight in lbs.)		
		5'6"	5' 10"	6' 2"
Below 18.5	Underweight	Under 115 lbs	Under 129 lbs	Under 144 lbs
18.5 to 24.9	Normal	115 to 154 lbs	129 to 174 lbs	144 to 194 lbs
25.0 to 29.9	Overweight	155 to 185 lbs	175 to 208 lbs	195 to 233 lbs
30.0 and above	Obese	Over 186 lbs	Over 208 lbs	Over 233 lbs

This is the source of what we hear on the news. But with the increase in obesity, our collective weight is also going up. The average American male has gained 17.1 pounds and the average American female has added 15.4 pounds since 1988.

The amount of weight gained has varied across the states. For example, in Iowa, the average weight gain for males is 10.9 pounds – just slightly more than half a pound per year. In contrast, the average weight gain for males in Texas is 24.2 pounds – over 1 pound per year. For females, this ranged from 6.3 pounds in Wisconsin to 26.2 pounds in New Jersey. Tables 2 & 3 show the top gainers and losers, and Table 4 shows weight gain by gender for every state.

**Table 2: Least Weight Gained**

Weight Gain per Person from 1988 to 2008				
Males	Pounds Gained		Females	Pounds Gained
Iowa	10.9		Wisconsin	6.3
Massachusetts	11.7		Louisiana	6.8
Indiana	11.9		Pennsylvania	7.1
Minnesota	12.2		North Dakota	7.8
Rhode Island	12.4		Massachusetts	7.9

**Table 3: Most Weight Gained**

Weight Gain per Person from 1988 to 2008			
Males	Pounds Gained	Females	Pounds Gained
Arkansas	19.9	California	21.7
Virginia	20.2	Alaska	22.2
Oklahoma	20.7	Kansas	22.4
Arizona	21.2	Texas	22.6
Texas	24.2	New Jersey	26.2

**Methodology**

Data for the analysis came from the 1988 through 2008 Behavioral Risk Surveillance System (BRFSS) files ([www.cdc.gov/brfss](http://www.cdc.gov/brfss)). U.S. Census population projections were used to adjust the data for changing age profiles over the two decades.

Average weight and height for 1988 and 2008 were estimated for six age cohorts for females and for males. For states not reporting data in 1988, the height and weight of the state was estimated using linear regression from available subsequent years.

The average weight for all cohorts in 1988 was adjusted for changes in the average height (in inches) over the last two decades as follows:  $\text{Adjusted 1988 Weight} = (\text{Measured 1988 Weight}) \times (\text{Average Height in 2008})^2 / (\text{Average Height in 1988})^2$ . This adjustment is analogous to the ratio used in the BMI calculations.

The difference between the measured 2008 weight and the adjusted 1988 weight was calculated for each cohort and the results for the six age cohorts of a gender were weighted by the proportion of the adult population of that gender represented in 2008 in the state. Cohort contributions were summed and resulted in the final weight gain reported for the gender.

**Table 4:** Weight Gain from 1988 to 2008

State	Weight Gain (pounds)	
	Male	Female
Alabama	19.7	16.0
Alaska*	14.5	22.2
Arizona	21.2	21.0
Arkansas*	19.9	13.6
California	13.5	21.7
Colorado*	15.5	11.1
Connecticut	14.6	12.2
Delaware*	15.9	8.5
Florida	18.2	10.6
Georgia	18.6	17.0
Hawaii	16.0	15.1
Idaho	17.8	15.5
Illinois	17.3	13.7
Indiana	11.9	8.4
Iowa	10.9	14.3
Kansas*	18.6	22.4
Kentucky	17.8	12.2
Louisiana*	17.9	6.8
Maine	13.3	11.1
Maryland	18.0	18.6
Massachusetts	11.7	7.9
Michigan	16.7	12.8
Minnesota	12.2	14.2
Mississippi*	16.0	17.0
Missouri	18.5	18.8
Montana	16.6	18.1
Nebraska	18.5	14.5
Nevada*	18.7	21.0
New Hampshire	17.7	10.4
New Jersey*	18.2	26.2
New Mexico	17.7	16.3
New York	18.2	16.2
North Carolina	18.1	10.6
North Dakota	16.1	7.8
Ohio	17.2	13.5
Oklahoma	20.7	20.8
Oregon*	18.2	13.5
Pennsylvania*	15.7	7.1
Rhode Island	12.4	17.8
South Carolina	18.1	14.3
South Dakota	17.9	11.2
Tennessee	19.4	17.9
Texas	24.2	22.6
Utah	16.2	15.9
Vermont*	13.1	11.7
Virginia*	20.2	16.7
Washington	15.7	15.1
West Virginia	17.7	15.4
Wisconsin	15.9	6.3
Wyoming*	13.7	15.8
United States	17.1	15.4

\* Based on estimated 1988 weight and height