



Survey of Behaviours and Patterns of Care for Obese & Overweight Canadians

Sara F.L. Kirk¹, Richard H. Tytus², Ross T. Tsuyuki³, Arya M. Sharma³

¹Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia; ²McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario; ³University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta

Abstract

Background

In 2007, the Canadian Medical Association Journal published clinical practice guidelines for the management and prevention of obesity in adults and children. However, we know very little about how these guidelines relate to actual weight management practices and behaviours in Canada. To better understand the weight management behaviours and patterns of care for obese and overweight Canadians, we studied self-reported behaviours and experiences from a national survey.

Methods

A random, nationally representative sample of Canadian households was surveyed from March 23 to April 3, 2009 as part of an Ipsos Reid Telephone Omnibus survey. Multiple calls were made to each of 22,175 households comprising the sample to ensure its integrity. A total of 2,004 randomly selected respondents, aged ≥18, completed 25 questions on their weight management behaviours and experiences. Results are weighted according to Statistics Canada data for gender, age, income and region.

Results

BMI values were calculated from self-reported height and weight, yielding the following distribution: 33% 25-30, 20% ≥ 30. Frequency of physician visits was significantly higher for individuals with higher BMI; 89% with BMI ≥ 30 had seen a family doctor at least once in the last year. Treatment by a doctor for one or more co-morbidities was reported by 30% with BMI 25-30 and 46% with BMI ≥ 30. Most (64% BMI 25-30, 89% BMI ≥ 30) had tried to lose weight, but seeking or receiving weight management advice from a physician was less common: 80% with BMI 25-30 and 51% with BMI ≥ 30 reported never being advised by a physician to lose weight. Only 14% of BMI 25-30 and 18% of BMI ≥ 30 reported having a physician measure their waist circumference in the last year. The most common methods used for losing weight were self-directed diet and exercise.

Conclusions

Although the majority of obese Canadians regularly see a doctor, they do not usually seek or receive advice about weight management from their doctor. Most weight management efforts by Canadians are self-directed.

Introduction

Publication of the 2007 Canadian clinical practice guidelines (CPG) for the management and prevention of obesity marked an important milestone in efforts to cope with the rising prevalence of obesity in Canada. An important goal of the CPGs is to effect change in clinical practice and, ultimately, decrease the prevalence of obesity and its complications among Canadian children and adults.⁴

But in fact, we know very little about how the CPG relate to current practices in Canada. To gain a better understanding of current weight management behaviours and patterns of care for overweight and obesity, we conducted a national survey of self-reported weight management behaviours and experiences of Canadians.

Methods

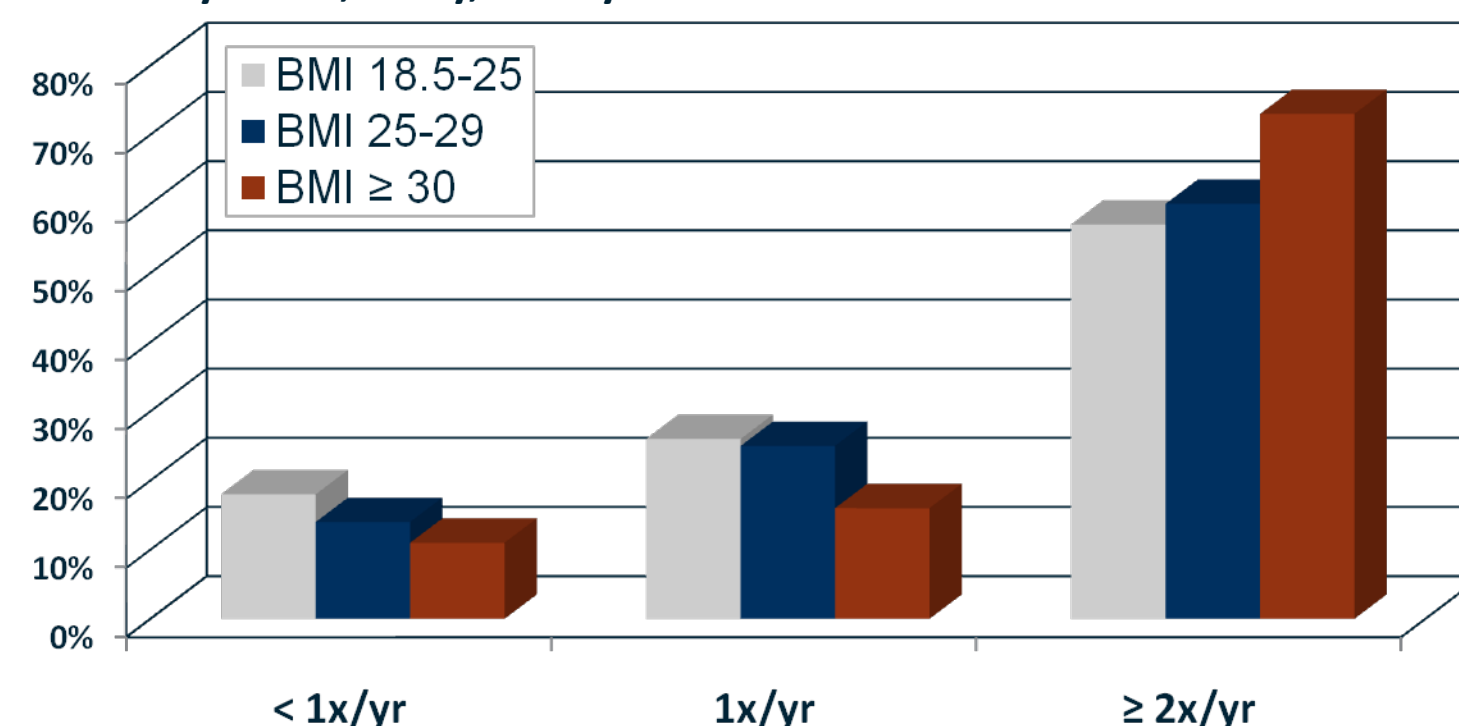
As part of an Ipsos Reid Telephone Omnibus study, we surveyed a random, nationally representative sample of Canadian households from March 23 to April 3, 2009, via a national network of computer-assisted telephone interviewing stations. Each of 22,175 households comprising the sample received multiple calls to ensure sample integrity. Professional interviewers, supervisors and field coordinators collected, tabulated, and quality-assured the results.

A total of 2,004 randomly selected respondents, aged 18 and older, completed 25 questions on their weight management behaviours and experiences. Respondents also provided basic demographic information, and self-reported weight and height, from which BMI was calculated. Results were weighted according to Statistics Canada data for gender, age, income and region.

Results

Overall, 53% of respondents were overweight (BMI 25-29) or obese (BMI ≥ 30). Of the total population, 85% reported seeing a doctor at least once in the last year. The percent of respondents seeing a doctor in the last year increased with BMI, as did the mean number of visits (Figure 1). Many (30% BMI 25-29, 46% BMI ≥ 30) were being treated for one or more weight-related comorbidities.

Figure 1
“How many times, if any, have you seen a doctor in the last 12 months?”



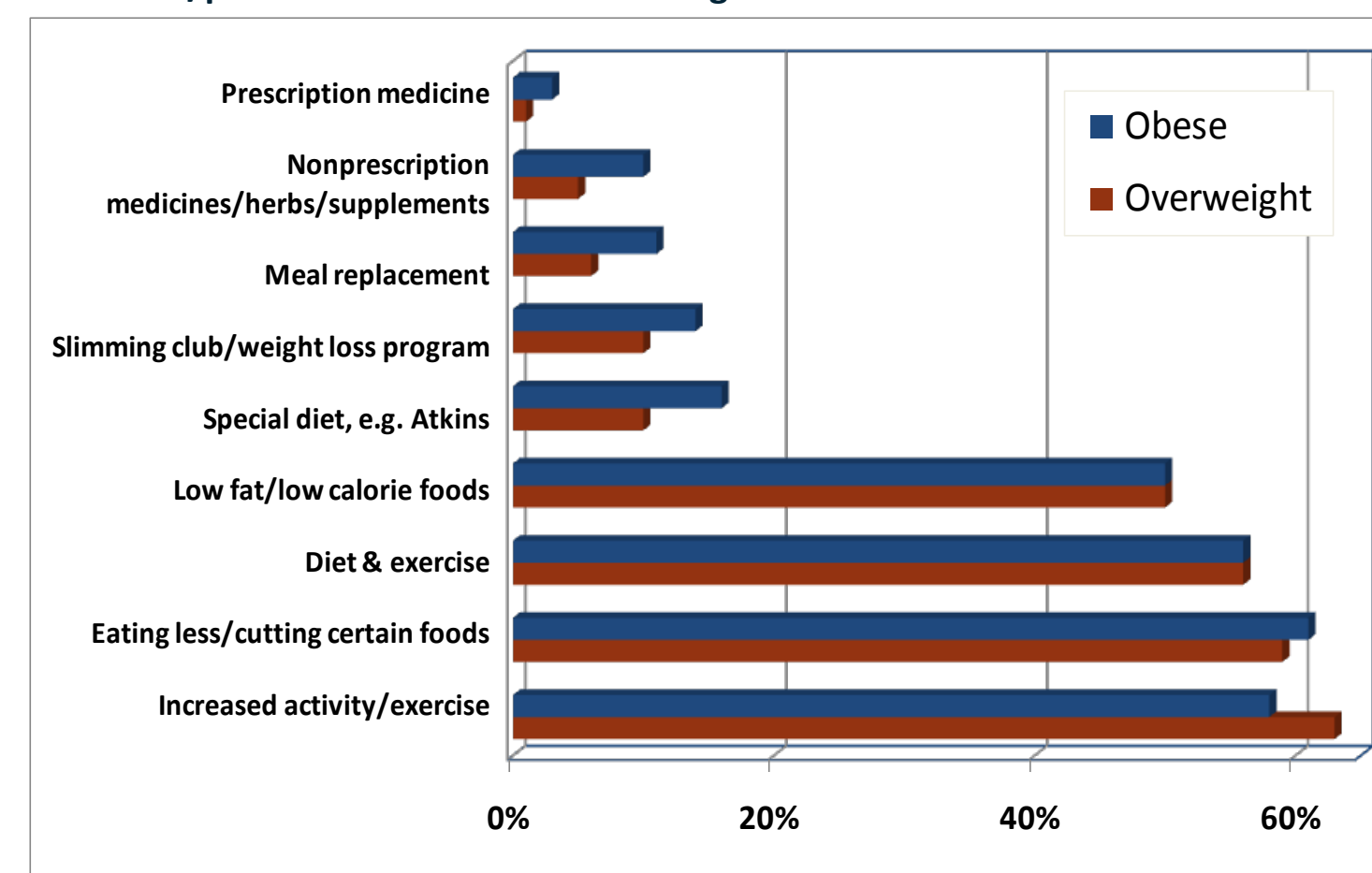
Of those surveyed, 45% had tried to lose weight over the last 12 months, with a slightly smaller percent (41%) responding that they had never tried to lose weight (Table 1).

Table 1
“When, if ever, did you last try to lose weight?”

Ever tried	Tried in last 12 months
BMI 25-29: 64%	BMI 25-29: 50%
BMI ≥ 30: 89%	BMI ≥ 30: 71%
No wt-related comorbidities: 53%	No wt-related comorbidities: 40%
Wt-related comorbidities: 73%	Wt-related comorbidities: 56%

Being more active/doing more exercise (63%), eating less food (61%), a combination of diet and exercise (58%) and eating low fat and low calorie foods (50%), were the most frequent methods used (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Methods/products ever used to lose weight



Overall, 67% of all respondents reported that they had never specifically asked a healthcare professional about losing weight, while 80% had never been advised to lose weight without specifically being asked (Table 2).

Table 2
“Which, if any, healthcare professionals have you ever asked about losing weight?”
“Has a doctor ever advised you to lose weight without you specifically asking?”

Never asked family physician about losing weight	Never advised by a doctor to lose weight
BMI 25-29: 78%	BMI 25-29: 81%
BMI ≥ 30: 53%	BMI ≥ 30: 51%

Table 4
“Why have you never specifically asked the doctor for advice & help to lose weight?”

	Overweight	Obese
Just don't think of mentioning it	11%	22%
Don't think I'm overweight	50%	20%
Not a problem a doctor can help	12%	11%
Rather talk to friends/family	6%	10%
Never enough time with doctor	3%	6%
Embarrassed	1%	2%

The percent who responded “I don't think I'm overweight” decreased with BMI (normal range, 69%; overweight, 50%; obese, 20%). But the percent who responded “I don't think of being overweight as a medical condition” remained fairly constant irrespective of BMI.

Only 14% of the total population reported that a doctor had measured their waist circumference in the last year: 14% of BMI 25-29 and 18% of BMI ≥ 30.

In contrast to waist circumference, most overweight and obese respondents reported that they had been screened for hypertension (96% BMI 25-29, 99% BMI ≥ 30) and diabetes (59% BMI 25-29, 74% BMI ≥ 30).

Conclusions

The overwhelming majority of overweight and obese Canadians regularly see a doctor, but they don't usually seek or receive advice about weight management from their doctor. Most of their weight loss efforts are self-directed. They frequently report being screened for diabetes and hypertension, and being treated for weight-related comorbidities.

The frequency with which they report having their waist circumference measured is disappointingly low.

Acknowledgments and Reference

This study was conducted with financial support and collaborative assistance from GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare.

⁴McDonald; 2007-04-10, CMAJ; Management and prevention of obesity in adults and children.