

# More men than women have chronic conditions

MOH survey shows more men are overweight and have high blood pressure and cholesterol

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The latest report on the health of people here is in, and it is not looking very good for the men.

More than four in 10 male Singapore residents are overweight, with more of them also suffering from chronic conditions such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels when compared with women.

These were the findings of the Ministry of Health's (MOH) pilot National Population Health Survey 2016/17, the results of which were released recently.

The survey of more than 3,000 people found that 43 per cent of men aged between 18 and 69 were

either obese or overweight, compared with 29 per cent of women.

Obesity is a risk factor for chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. Smoking and drinking can also add to the risk.

According to the survey, 21 per cent of men smoke and 13 per cent binge drink, compared with 3 and 5 per cent respectively for women.

While describing the prevalence of binge drinking as "low", MOH highlighted how it has seen an increasing trend from 2.2 per cent in 2001 to 9 per cent last year overall, and that this "bears watching".

The survey did health checks on 1,100 respondents. Among those aged 18 to 69, 41 per cent of men have high cholesterol levels, compared with 27 per cent of women. Similarly, 24 per cent of men have high blood pressure and 10 per cent have diabetes, compared with 20 per cent and 7 per cent for women.

While MOH said that the latest survey results could not be com-

pared against older surveys as the methodology differs, the recent results indicate that more people now suffer from high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels.

Between the 2010 National Health Survey and the latest, the number of adults here with high blood pressure went up from 18.9 per cent to 21.5 per cent, while those with high cholesterol levels rose from 25.2 per cent to 33.6 per cent.

MOH said this increase is likely due to both the ageing population – since older people have more chronic conditions – and the number of people here who are overweight.

Dr Chia Shi-Lu, head of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Health, agreed that ageing likely contributed to the rise in chronic conditions "since age is an important risk factor for the diseases studied".

He said lifestyle changes can reduce chronic diseases, but "sadly we cannot slow or stop ageing".

Professor Teo Yik Ying, dean of

## Medical conditions and habits

	Men (%)	Women (%)
Overweight (including obese)	43.4	29.4
Obesity	7	10.3
Diabetes mellitus	10.3	7.1
High blood pressure	23.6	19.6
High cholesterol level	40.9	26.6
Daily smoking	21.1	3.4
Binge drinking	13.2	5

Source: NATIONAL POPULATION HEALTH SURVEY 2016/17 SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, and Dr Chia said the value of such surveys increases as more is done for a longitudinal comparison. A follow-up survey for 2018/19 has just started and aims for at least 6,000 respondents from 16,000 selected households.

Prof Teo added that a breakdown by age group would give a better picture of the health of people here.

The survey report added that both the MOH and the Health Promotion Board "will continue to encourage the take-up of enhanced Screen for Life subsidies, to help increase the early detection of diabetes, hypertension and hyperlipidaemia for prompt intervention and management".

The Enhanced Screen for Life programme charges Singaporeans 40 years and older no more than \$5 to

screen for up to five medical conditions, and includes follow-up consultation. Two in three people aged 40 to 69 screen at the recommended intervals.

Dr Chia said early detection helps in managing these conditions, but does not prevent people from getting them. Prof Teo added: "It is much harder to expect disease trends to change in the short term even with very effective health promotion and prevention policies, since the benefits typically take many years to manifest."

The survey at least showed eight in 10 adult Singaporeans seem to be getting enough physical activity. MOH said: "This is encouraging and demonstrates Singaporeans' awareness of the importance of staying active."

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