

## Adult Obesity Prevalence: Addressing A Growing Concern in Colorado

*By Robyn Spittle, MSPH*

### **Overview of Obesity:**

In Colorado, as in the United States, obesity is rising to epidemic proportions and becoming a threat to our citizen's health. National Public Health Week, April 5<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup>, 2004 will focus on obesity and physical activity in the United States. Starting April 5<sup>th</sup>, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment in collaboration with local health departments, is launching a campaign called "Steps to a Healthier Colorado". This campaign will encourage all individuals to eat less, move more, and live longer. This newsletter describes the obesity issue in Colorado and provides the campaign website which contains useful tips for your patients on reducing obesity and information on healthy eating.

"Obesity" refers specifically to an excess amount of body fat; "overweight" refers to an excess amount of body weight that includes muscle, bone, fat, and water. Everyone needs a certain amount of body fat for functions such as shock absorption, heat insulation, and stored energy. However, excess body fat impacts the overall health of an individual by raising the risk of illness from at least twenty health conditions including heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. To assist in determining if a person is obese or overweight, we use Body Mass Index or BMI. BMI is calculated based on weight and height ( $\text{kg}/\text{m}^2$ ) and determines whether a person is in a healthy or unhealthy weight range. Current guidelines state that a BMI of 25 to 29.9 indicate a person is overweight and a BMI of 30 or higher indicates a person is obese.

The data presented in this article is from both the National and the Colorado Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BFRSS), which is an ongoing statewide telephone survey of non-institutionalized adults ages 18 and older regarding their health behaviors and preventive health practices. The Survey Research Unit at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment conducts the survey and selects respondents using a random digit dialing sampling technique. BFRSS measures are self-reported by respondents, therefore, BFRSS underestimates the prevalence of obesity since people tend to underreport their weight. The actual prevalence of adult obesity in Colorado is likely higher than is estimated by the BFRSS.

In 2002, an estimated 22.2% of the U.S. adult population 20 years and older in age were obese and 59.2% of U.S. adults 20 years and older in age were either overweight or obese.<sup>1</sup> In addition, 400,000 deaths in the U.S. in 2000 can be attributed to poor diet and physical inactivity, an increase of 100,000 in such deaths from 1990.<sup>2</sup>

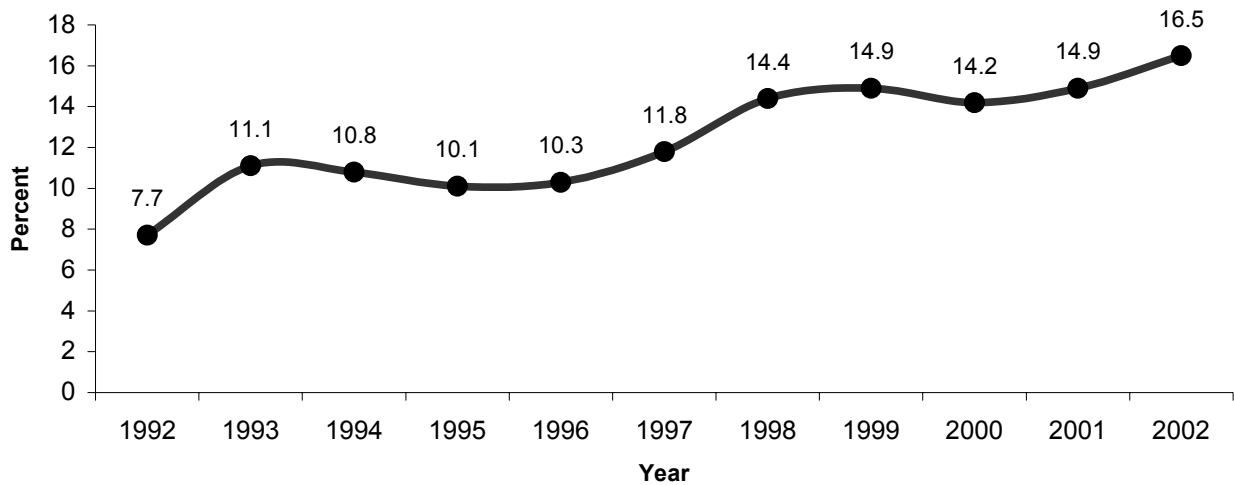
### **Obesity in Colorado:**

In recent years, Colorado has had one of the lowest prevalence rates of obesity in the U.S. However, over time the prevalence of obesity has steadily increased among adults in Colorado. Between 1992 and 2002, obesity more than doubled among adults from 7.7% to 16.5% (Figure 1). Healthy People 2010, a set of health objectives for the nation launched by the Department of Health



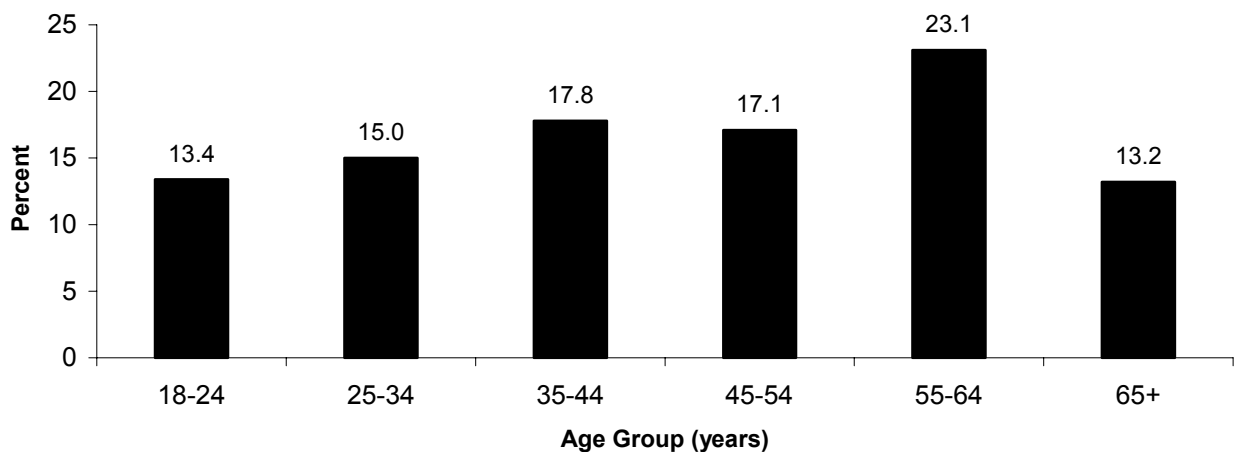
and Human Services in 2000, have set a target to reduce adult obesity in the U.S. to 15%. In 2001, Colorado had an overall obesity prevalence of 14.9%, just below the Healthy People 2010 Target. In 2002, the obesity prevalence increased to 16.5%, and 53.5% of the population in Colorado in 2002 was either overweight or obese.

**Figure 1:** Obesity prevalence among adults 18 years and older, Colorado BRFSS 1992-2002.



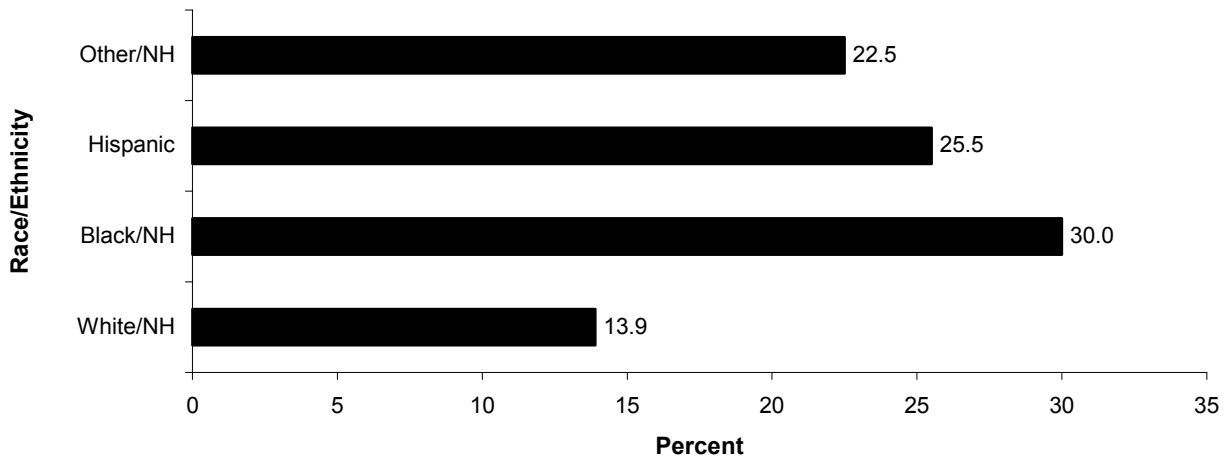
There are significant variations in the prevalence of obesity by demographic characteristics in Colorado. Obesity prevalence is lowest among 18 to 24 year-olds (13.4%) and 65+ year-olds (13.2%) and highest among 55 to 64 year-olds (23.1%) (Figure 2).

**Figure 2:** Obesity prevalence by age group, Colorado BRFSS 2002.



The prevalence of obesity in Colorado varies widely by race and ethnicity. Non-Hispanic Whites have the lowest prevalence rate at 13.9% and non-Hispanic Blacks have the highest at 30.0%. It should be noted that obesity prevalence varies widely between genders by race. Female Hispanics, Non-Hispanic Blacks, and Other/Non Hispanic have a much higher prevalence of obesity than their male counterparts.

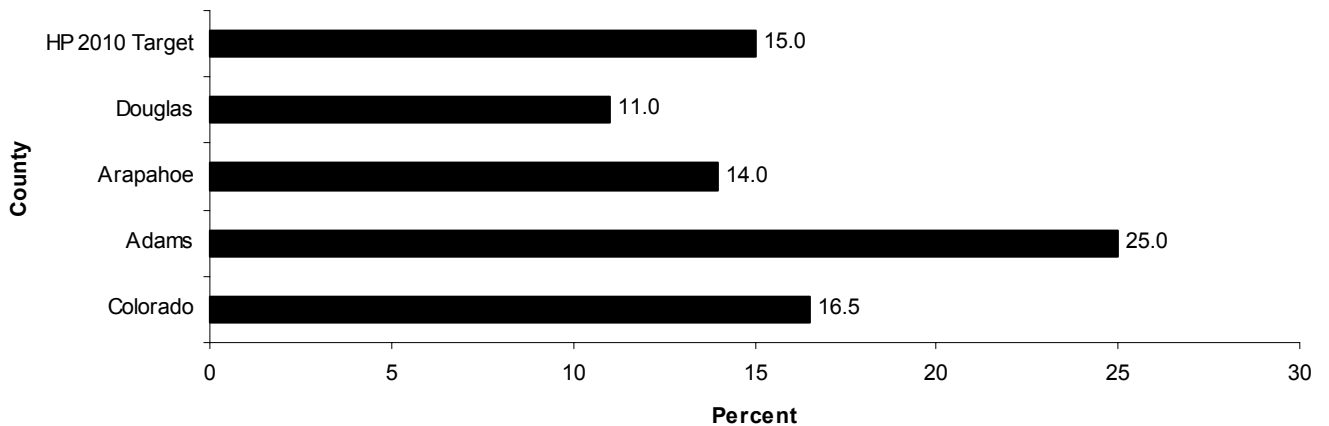
**Figure 3:** Obesity prevalence by race/ethnicity, Colorado BRFSS 2002.



**Obesity in Adams, Arapahoe, and Douglas Counties:**

Adams County has an obesity prevalence rate of 25% and is well above our state prevalence rate of 16.5% and the Healthy People 2010 Target of 15%. Arapahoe and Douglas County are just below the Healthy People 2010 Target at 14% and 11%, respectively.

**Figure 4:** Obesity prevalence by County, Colorado BRFSS 2002.



It is important to improve our eating habits and increase physical activity to reduce obesity and other chronic diseases. Increasing knowledge about opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity is the first step. For more ideas and to become involved, join in the “Steps to a Healthier Colorado”.

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<sup>1</sup> CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System – Prevalence Data, Nationwide – 2002.  
<http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/brfss/>

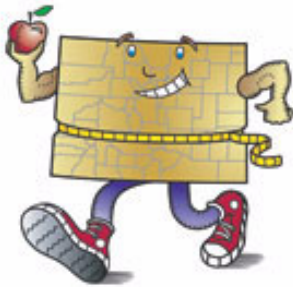
<sup>2</sup> CDC National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Chronic Disease Prevention, Fact Sheet: Actual Causes of Death in the United States, 2000. [http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/factsheets/death\\_causes2000.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/factsheets/death_causes2000.htm)

*Data Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS), CDC*

Comments or questions, please call Tri-County Health Department:  
(303) 220-9200.

After hours Tri-County Health Department number: (303) 461-2342.

## Steps to A Healthier Colorado



**Eat Less, Move More,  
Live Longer!**

**Kick up your heels. Take the stairs.  
Walk, run, stretch or skip. Be well  
rounded (but perhaps just a little less  
round). Basic exercise and good  
nutrition can help you live longer and be  
healthier...  
Now take a hike!**

For more information, go to: <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/steps/index.html>

**Tri-County Health Department  
Selected Diseases by Date of Report  
Adams, Arapahoe, and Douglas Counties  
2004 Year-to-date Through March**

