

# Study: 75 percent of Fox Valley adults are overweight

[Shane Nvman](#), USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin Published 9:00 a.m. CT Feb. 9, 2018 | Updated 12:56 p.m. CT Feb. 9, 2018

NEENAH - Bad news, Fox Valley: We're in even worse shape than we thought.



*(Photo: Getty Images/iStockphoto)*

New findings from Weight of the Fox Valley show that about 75 percent of Fox Valley adults are overweight or obese. That's a big jump from the previous figure of 64 percent reported in 2015.

A significant reason for the change is better data. The 2015 figure was determined through self-reported height and weight measurements. The new data is the result of actual measurements by health care professionals taken in 2016.

The details of the Weight of the Fox Valley initiative's latest study were presented Friday morning at the Bridgewood Conference Center in Neenah.

"I would look upon it as an epidemic," said Dr. Thomas Zoch, vice president of Care Management-Clinical for Ascension Wisconsin and Weight of the Fox Valley co-chair. "I would look upon it as a very serious issue because dovetailing to this high BMI is diabetes, a chronic disease, heart disease, stroke, heart attacks and other medical issues. Some cancers are more prevalent when one is in that obese range."

Being overweight or obese can also lead to osteoarthritis, mental health problems and in the long run, added health care costs.

"It's an issue that we need to keep on our radar, keep this out in front of us and continue to recognize we do have this issue — and what can we do to help our community members? ... Each and every member out there is important to me and to us."

These figures are based on body mass index, or BMI. An adult's BMI is found using height and weight measurements and the results correlate with body fat.

An adult with a BMI of 18.5 to 24.9 is considered at normal weight. A BMI of between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight and 30 or greater qualifies as obese. It's an imperfect way to gauge the body fat of an individual, but is widely seen as the standard for measuring large populations.

It's not a perfect science, of course, as Zoch pointed out. It only accounts for the folks who've accessed health care in the three-county area. And BMI is by no means the perfect snapshot of a person's overall health.

"You measure the Packers, as an example, they have very high BMIs yet they're very muscular, they're very strong," he said. "So there are some limitations to relying just on BMI."

"With that being said, the results are a little surprising."

The study found that 31 percent of adults 18 or older are overweight and another 43 percent are obese. Also, 28 percent of youth in the Fox Valley fall into either the overweight or obese category.

The new data are the result of a collaborative effort between the Ascension, Aurora and ThedaCare health systems, which gathered measurements of about 91,000 adults (whose identities were removed).

City of Appleton health officer Kurt Eggebrecht said the data collection work by Weight of the Fox Valley is steps ahead of what's happening elsewhere.

"This is quite unique," he said. "It's kind of a forward looking way compared to what state or federal government does."

The older, self-reported data came from a group of about 1,600 adults who were randomly selected and were asked questions about their health over the phone.

The new numbers are believed to be more accurate, Zoch said, because "individuals tend to over-represent their height and under-represent their weight."

Data from the National Center for Disease Control show that about 66 percent of Wisconsin adults are overweight or obese. Nationally, about 65 percent of adults land in those categories. Those numbers, however, are the result of self-reported measurements.

Moving forward, the hope is the more accurate data can help the Weight of the Fox Valley and its action teams — which focus on health in the workplace, early care and education, active communities and our food systems — be better equipped to continue the mission. As Weight of the Fox Valley program manager Sarah Wright put it, it's about creating "a culture of health in the Fox Valley."

"(We need to) make it achievable for everyone to achieve and maintain a healthy weight at every age," she said, "and really change that trajectory of what we see here happening in our community."

Weight of the Fox Valley is a community health initiative within Outagamie, Calumet and Winnebago counties spearheaded by the United Way in the Fox Cities and Oshkosh. Launched in 2013, it brought together a coalition of hospitals and health care systems, governments, businesses, nonprofits and philanthropic organizations hoping to promote healthy eating and exercise.

## Fox Valley BMI at a glance

- ▶ 75 percent of adults are overweight or obese
- ▶ 31 percent of adults are overweight, 43 percent are obese
- ▶ 28 percent of youth are overweight or obese
- ▶ 15 percent of youth are overweight, 14 percent are obese

*Data collected from individuals in Outagamie, Calumet and Winnebago counties who visited the Ascension, Aurora and ThedaCare health systems in 2016.*