

## Fat Planet: Top 10 Fattest Countries 2010

### Global obesity by the numbers: countries with the highest percentage of fat people.

By Emily Stone — Special to GlobalPost

Published: November 22, 2010

Obesity is generally measured by a person's body mass index (BMI), which is a weight-to-height ratio. A BMI of 25 is considered overweight; 30 is obese.

Here is the GlobalPost list of the world's fattest countries, based on the percentage of the population with a BMI over 25, according to the World Health Organization:

#### 1) Nauru: 95 percent

The tiny South Pacific island of Nauru tops the world's fattest list. A whopping 95 percent of its people have a BMI above 25. Nauruans historically engaged in fattening ceremonies, where well-born young women were kept inside and fed to excess. That legacy, plus the transition for agriculturally poor Nauru from a diet of fruit and fish to Western-style meals, has been devastating.

#### 2) Micronesia: 92 percent

#### 3) The Cook Islands: 92 percent

#### 4) Tonga: 92 percent

#### 5) Niue: 84 percent

#### 6) Samoa: 83 percent

#### 7) Palau: 81 percent

#### 8) United States: 79 percent

#### 9) Kiribati: 77 percent.

#### 10) Dominica: 76 percent

*Others on the 2010 GlobalPost list of fattest countries:*

#### Kuwait: 75 percent

In the 20 years after oil was discovered in Kuwait, the population changed from mostly nomadic Bedouin communities to wealthy, urban dwellers. Their eating habits changed just as quickly.

"It's the worst personification of a diet you can imagine," said Barry Popkin, director of the University of North Carolina's Interdisciplinary Obesity Center and author of "The World Is Fat," referring to meat- and oil-heavy meals, often eaten outside the home. This is coupled with the stifling heat that discourages physical activity and an influx of immigrants who do most of the country's physical labor.

**Argentina: 75 percent**

Argentina, the leader among South American countries on the fatness scale, is struggling with the same challenges as bulging countries the world over — an urbanizing population that's eating more and moving less. James has calculated that when people move from the countryside to the city, their daily caloric needs drop by up to 400 calories. Subtract another 400 calories per day once their jobs become computerized and sedentary.

**Mexico: 73 percent**

Earlier this year, Mexico's government announced a ban on junk food, sugary juices and soda in schools. "The current government is one of the most active governments in the world in trying to push for better diet changes," said Popkin, whom the government enlisted to help fight obesity as well as a skyrocketing diabetes rate. Next up is a plan to simplify the country's food labels so people better understand what they're consuming.

**Australia: 71 percent**

A [study this year](#) showed that being overweight has overtaken smoking as the leading preventable cause of disease in Western Australia. Australians have a propensity for sugary drinks and a rapidly escalating obesity rate, yet little has been done to halt the trend. "They have a good scientific community that knows everything they should do and they're trying, but the government isn't doing much," Popkin said.

**Egypt: 70 percent**

Egypt's women carry the obesity burden, with 76 percent of females overweight compared to 65 percent of males. "They don't move and they're around food all day," Popkin said.

**Greece: 70 percent**

Besides having some of the lowest rates of physical activity in the European Union, Greeks are clinging to their olive oil. In the past few decades, most Greeks stopped eating a traditional Mediterranean diet, which allowed for liberal use of olive oil as a source of fat. Now that their intake of meat has risen, they need to cut back. That's a hard sell for Greeks who tout the mono-saturated oil's heart healthiness.

"It doesn't kill you from a heart attack," said Philip James, chairman of the London-based International Obesity TaskForce. "It just blows you up."

"We're locked in genetically with taste buds that respond to fat, sugar and salt," said James. Those were precious commodities to be gobbled up when we were roaming the African savanna. Now we need to stop gobbling.

**Belarus: 67 percent**

On the whole, Central and Eastern Europeans are fatter than their western neighbors. This is due in part to the former Soviet bloc's isolation from Western influence, which came to an abrupt end with the end of the Cold War. "When the wall went down, 60 percent of total foreign investment in Central and Eastern Europe was from fast food, confectionary and soft drink companies," James said. Less formal marketing plays a part too, such as the nutritional role models presented in American films, where the most glamorous people enjoy steaks and soft drinks.

**United Kingdom: 66 percent**

England, where the obesity rate has doubled since 1980, is seeing a bit of hope in its efforts to trim its collective waist. Celebrity chef Jamie Oliver's 2004 initiative to bring smart eating and cooking instruction to schools has helped improve childhood obesity rates, James said, though adult stats remain stubbornly high. One example of success: a survey showed that 19 percent of boys and 20 percent of girls ate at least five daily portions of fruit and vegetables in 2008, compared to 10 and 13 percent just four years earlier.

<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/health/101119/fat-top-10-obese>