



Key health risk factors

Extracted from *Risk factor trends: age patterns in key health risk factors over time*
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Health risk factors are factors that increase the likelihood of developing a disease or health disorder.

- Some health risk factors are **not modifiable**, such as one's age, sex and genetic make-up.
- **Modifiable** health risk factors are those over which individuals have some influence and which can be grouped into health-related behaviours (for example, diet, exercise, smoking and alcohol consumption) and biomedical factors (for example, raised blood pressure value and abnormal cholesterol level).

Discussion question

Why is it important to identify modifiable health risk factors?

Key risk factors:

Overweight & obesity
Physical inactivity
Poor diet
Smoking & excessive alcohol consumption

can lead to



diseases such as:

Cardiovascular disease
Type 2 diabetes
Chronic kidney disease

What are the trends?

Overweight & obesity

- Between 1995 & 2007–08, measurements of body mass index and waist circumference among adults rose.
- Largest rise of overweight/obesity was among females aged 12 to 44 years.

Physical inactivity

- Between 1989–90 & 2007–08, the proportion of adults who were physically inactive remained high at over 50% for all age groups.
- Largest rise of physical inactivity was seen in 15–24 year olds.

Poor diet

- The vast majority of adults and people aged 12 to 17 years did not eat enough vegetables.

Smoking

- Rates of smoking have fallen substantially among young people, particularly teenagers, in the last decade.

Alcohol

- Increases were seen in the proportion of people aged 18 years or over who drank at long-term risky levels between 1995 and 2007–08 in all age groups, apart from men aged 75 years or over.

Summary of changes over time in risk factors by broad age groups

↑# most of the age/sex results within this broad age group are increasing

~ no change

| | 12–17 | 18–44 | 45–64 | 65+ |
|-------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| Overweight | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ |
| Physically inactive | ↑ | ↑# | ~ | ↑# |
| Insufficient vegetables | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑# |
| Smoking | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ |
| Excessive alcohol | ↓ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑# |