

Live Well

Risk Factors: Overweight and Obesity, Healthy Food and Physical Activity

Introduction

A body mass index (BMI) over 25 is considered overweight, while obesity is defined by a BMI of over 30¹ both are a form of malnutrition which results from excessive food intake (high energy foods) and insufficient exercise. A balanced diet and regular physical activity help maintain physical and mental wellbeing, improved sleep, mood and stress management and brain-related function². Poor diet and nutrition are considered as major risk factors for ill health and premature death in the UK³.

Topics included within this subchapter include:

- Overweight and obesity
- Food
- Physical inactivity / activity

Food and drink expenditure and purchases

Costs play a key part in nutrition: healthy foods like fruits and vegetables cost more, and fast food or easy cook food are more convenient for families but unhealthy. In the UK, the amount spent on food and drinks, including alcoholic drinks and food eaten out in an average household was £48.01 per person per week. The amount spent was 1.2% more than 2018/19 and 2.2% more than 2016/17 after taking inflation into account. All household food drinks formed a large share at £32.75 per person per week, an increase of 1.9% compared to 2018/19⁴. Similarly, the amount spent on food and drinks, including alcoholic drinks and food eaten out has per week increased in London, from £43.26 in 2017/18 to £53.74 in 2018/19⁵. These issues are dealt with in more detail in the Healthy Weight and Cost of Living chapters.

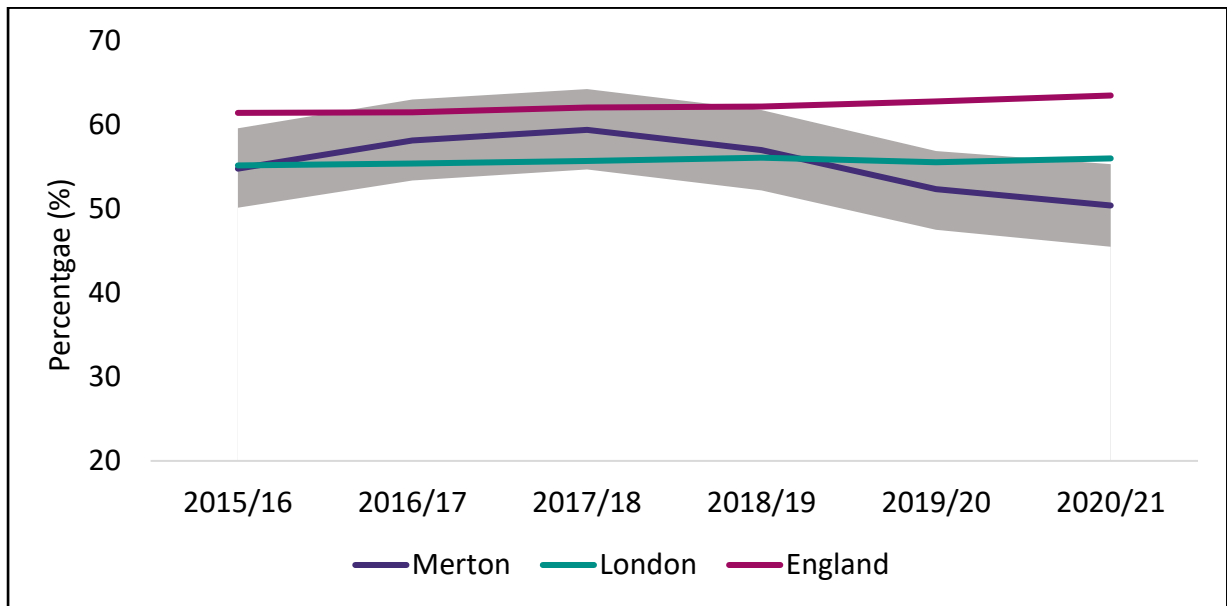
Physical inactivity / activity

A lack of physical activity is a significant risk factor for non-communicable diseases such as stroke, diabetes, and cancer. Less and less physical activity is occurring in many countries⁶. Regular physical activity also helps prevent hypertension, maintains a healthy body weight, and can improve mental health, quality of life and well-being⁷.

Overweight and Obesity

More than half of the population in Merton (50.4%, 79,550 people) aged 18+ were classified as overweight or obese in 2020/21. This is significantly lower than the recorded prevalence for England (63.5%) and London (56%)⁸. Figure 1 below shows that the prevalence of those classified as overweight or obese in Merton has decreased significantly since 2017/18.

Figure 1: Percentage (%) of adults (aged 18+) classified as overweight or obese in Merton, London, and England between 2015/16 – 2020/21. Source: Public Health Profiles, OHID⁸.

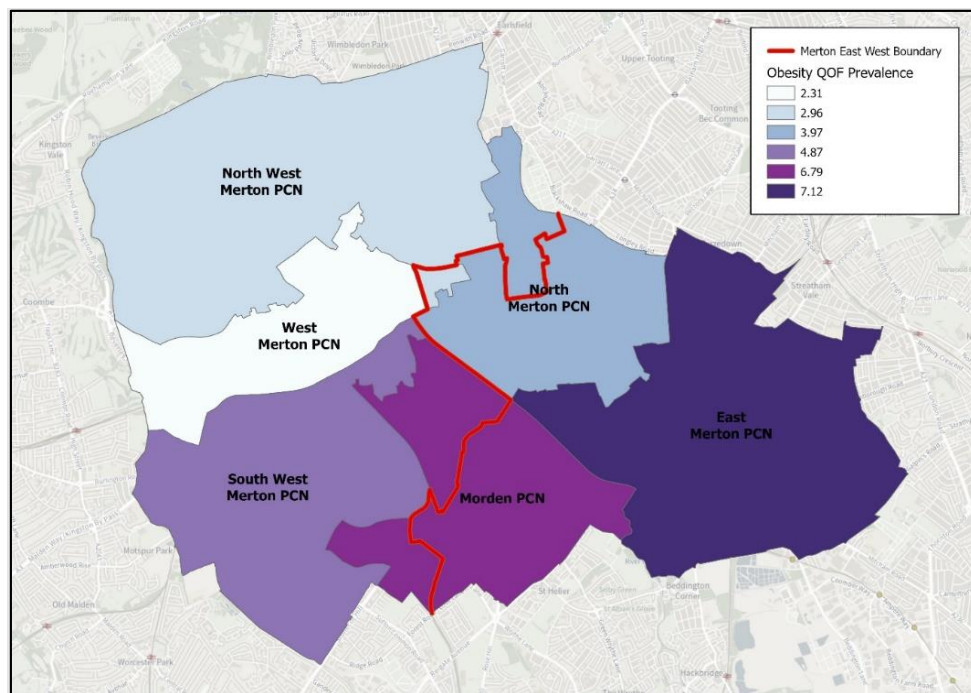


Generally, England has shown an increase in overweight and obesity from 2019/20 to 2020/21, trends have remained similar in London⁹.

Geographical Differences in Merton

Figure 2 shows the east of the borough (6.0%) has a significantly higher recorded prevalence of obesity when compared to the west of Merton (3.5%)¹⁰.

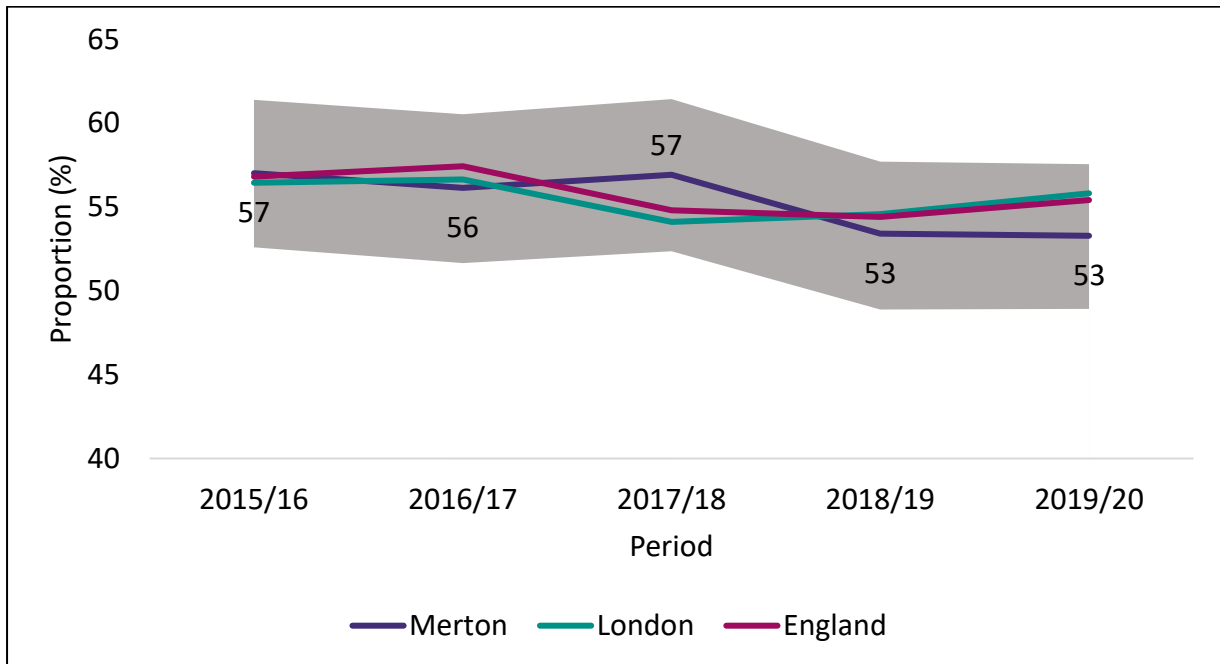
Figure 2: Percentage of patients aged 18 and over with a BMI greater than or equal to 30 in the previous 12 months, as recorded on practice disease registers in 2020/21 by Merton primary care network (PCN). Source: National General Practice Profiles, OHID; Quality Outcomes Framework (QOF), NHS Digital¹⁰.



Food

In 2019/20, 53.3% of Merton residents were recorded as meeting the recommended '5-a day' on a usual day, this is similar to London (55.8%) and England (55.4%) (Figure 3)¹¹. Therefore, approximately 75,800, or 1 in 2 Merton residents are not meeting the recommended 5-a-day on a usual day.

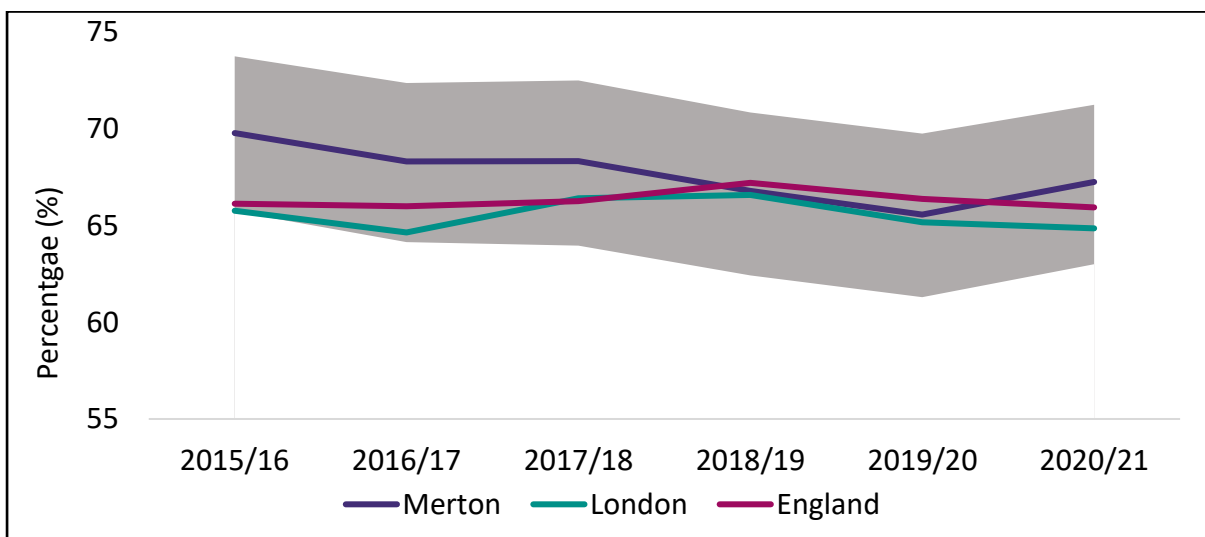
Figure 3: Proportion (%) of the population meeting the recommended 5-a day. Source: Public Health Profiles, OHID. Please note, this should not be compared to national survey findings as different methodologies are used.



Physical Activity

Physical activity is defined as participating in more than 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week. In 2020/21, 67.3% of Merton residents aged 19 and over were physically active. This is similar to London (64.9%) and England (65.9%) (Figure 4)¹². Physically inactivity is defined as doing less than 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week.

Figure 4: Percentage (%) of physical active adults (19+ years) from 2015/16 to 2020/21 in Merton, London, and England. Source: Productive healthy ageing profile, OHID.



The trend around the percentage of physically active adults over the last few years is not clear and possibly static¹³. The 'Active Lives' survey by Sport England received 490 responses from Merton residents and illustrates that we cannot be certain if levels of physical activity in Merton is different than London and England, with 20.2% (1 in 5, or 31,334) Merton residents reporting being inactive during November 2020 to November 2021 which is lower than London (24.3%) and England (23.4%)¹⁴.

References

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- ⁵ Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. Family food datasets [Internet]. GOV.UK. 2012 [cited 29 September 2022, last updated 27 January 2022]. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/family-food-datasets>
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- ⁷ Physical activity [Internet]. World Health Organisation; 2020 [cited 29 September 2022]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity#:~:text=Regular%20physical%20activity%20is%20proven,of%20life%20and%20well%2Dbeing>
- ⁸ Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. Obesity Profile [Internet]. Fingertips. [cited 29 September 2022]. Available from: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/national-child-measurement-programme/data#page/1/gid/1938133368/ati/301/iid/93088/age/168/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1>
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- ¹⁰ Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. Public health profiles [Internet]. Fingertips. [cited 29 September 2022]. Available from: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/qof%20obesity#page/4/gid/1/pat/167/ati/204/are/U40458/iid/92588/age/168/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1>
- ¹¹ Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. Obesity Profile [Internet]. Fingertips. [cited 29 September 2022]. Available from: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/national-child-measurement-programme/data#page/1/gid/1938133219/pat/6/par/E12000007/ati/301/are/E09000024/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1>

¹² Office for Health Improvement and Health Disparities. Productive Healthy Ageing Profile [Internet]. Fingertips. [cited 29 September 2022]. Available from: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/healthy-ageing/data#page/1/gid/1938133280/pat/159/par/K02000001/ati/15/are/E92000001/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1>

¹³ Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. Public health profiles [Internet]. Fingertips. [cited 29 September 2022]. Available from: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/physical%20activity>

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