

Two-in-three are dieting or exercising
In the Battle of the Bulge,
More Soldiers Than Successes

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE APRIL 25, 2006

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A Social Trends Report

In the Battle of the Bulge, More Soldiers Than Successes

At a time when the nation's waistline has expanded to record girth, about two-thirds (65%) of American adults are either dieting, exercising or doing both. But by their own reckoning, they don't have much to show for their efforts.

A quarter of all adults are currently on a diet, but, on average, the dieters are 29 pounds heavier than they would like to be. Those adults who are not dieting, by contrast, are 12 pounds heavier than they would like to be.

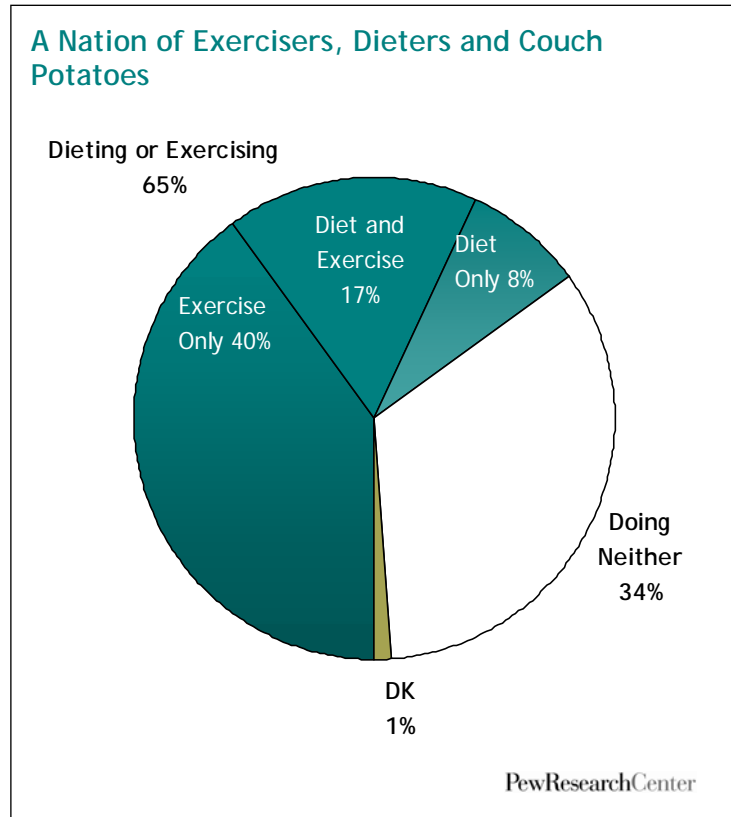
Nearly six-in-ten (57%) adults report that they do some kind of exercise program to keep fit. But among these regular exercisers, about two-thirds (65%) report that they aren't getting as much exercise as they should. And even though exercisers are closer to their ideal weight than are the dieters, they're still not hitting the mark.

Exercisers, on average, would like to be 14 pounds lighter than they are.

These findings are from a new Pew Research Center nationwide survey which also finds that Americans consider lack of exercise and lack of will power about eating to be the two most important reasons that many Americans are very overweight.

Key findings include:

- About a third (34%) of Americans are neither exercising nor dieting; 17% are doing both; 8% are dieting but not exercising; and 40% are exercising but not dieting. Those both dieting and exercising place themselves an average of 27 pounds over their ideal weight. Those doing neither put themselves 16 pounds over their ideal. (We defined dieters as those who report that they are currently trying to lose weight through some kind of special effort and exercisers as those who report that they take part in an exercise program to keep physically fit, apart from normal daily activities.)
- Among those who consider themselves overweight, 47% are currently dieting, and 75% say they have dieted in the past. About half (53%) of the self-described overweight are exercising.



- On average, Americans would like to be 16 pounds thinner than they are. Women would like to lose more weight than men; the average woman says she is 18 pounds above her ideal weight, while the average man says he is 14 pounds above his ideal weight.
- There is virtual consensus among Americans that it is hard for the very overweight to lose pounds; 93% of all adults say it is either hard or very hard. Dieters are even more inclined than non-dieters to say it is very hard to lose weight—a perception that may grow out of their own experience. Of those currently dieting, 83% have dieted in the past.
- About four-in-ten (42%) Americans report that they worry about their weight. About three quarters (73%) of dieters say they worry about their weight, as do 45% of exercisers.

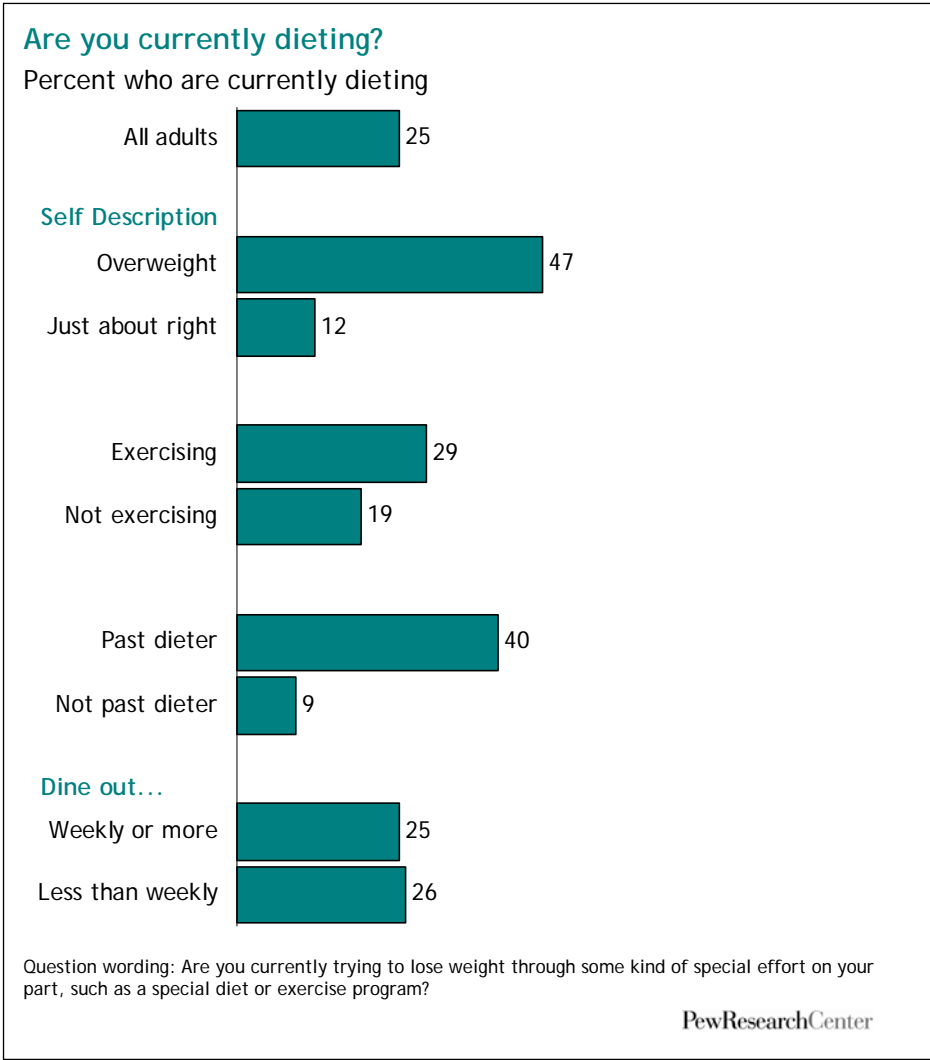
Who’s on a diet?

A quarter of Americans say that they are currently making a special effort to lose weight. More women than men are dieting. Among those over age 50, however, men and women are about equally likely to be dieting. Dieting does not vary significantly by education or income levels. Blacks, whites, and Hispanics are all about equally likely to be dieting.

Not surprisingly, those who consider themselves “overweight” are more likely to be dieting than those who think of themselves as “just about the right weight.”

Almost half (47%) of those who consider themselves overweight are dieting; whereas just 12% of those who consider their weight about right are dieting. Dieting does not appear to be related to dining out or eating at home. Those eating at least weekly at restaurants are just as likely to be dieting as those who go out for a meal less frequently.

About two thirds (67%) of people on a diet also take part in some kind of exercise program.



Been there, done that.

About half (52%) of all Americans say they lost weight through some kind of diet in the past. More women than men have ever dieted and people in the middle adult years (ages 30 to 64) are more likely to have dieted than either younger (ages 18 to 29) or older (65 and above) adults.

The overweight are more likely to have dieted than those who are about right on the scale. Those who worry about their weight are also more likely to have dieted.

In spite of some research reports which highlight the low probabilities of maintaining weight loss over time¹, 74% of those who say they've dieted in the past (defined as having lost at least five pounds through some sort of special effort) also say that they kept the weight off for at least one year. Whether or not they maintained that weight loss, past dieters are more likely than newbies to be dieting now. Four-in-ten of those who've lost weight in the past are currently dieting. Just 9% of those who've never lost weight through some kind of special effort are currently dieting.

Who's worrying about their weight?

About four-in-ten (42%) report that they worry about their weight all or some of the time. Women (51%) worry more than men (32%) about weight. More of those in their middle adult years worry about their weight than do either younger (ages 18 to 29) or older (ages 65 and above) adults. Worrying about weight is not strongly related to education or income levels. Hispanics worry more about weight than do either blacks or non-Hispanic whites.

Not surprisingly, dieters worry more than non-dieters, past dieters worry more than those who've never dieted, and those who are overweight are more likely to worry about their weight than are those who consider their weight about right.

¹ See Anderson, James W., Elizabeth C. Konz, Robert C. Frederich, and Constance L. Wood. 2001. Long-term Weight Loss-maintenance: A Meta-analysis of U.S. Studies. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 74(5): 579-584.

Exercising But Not Enough

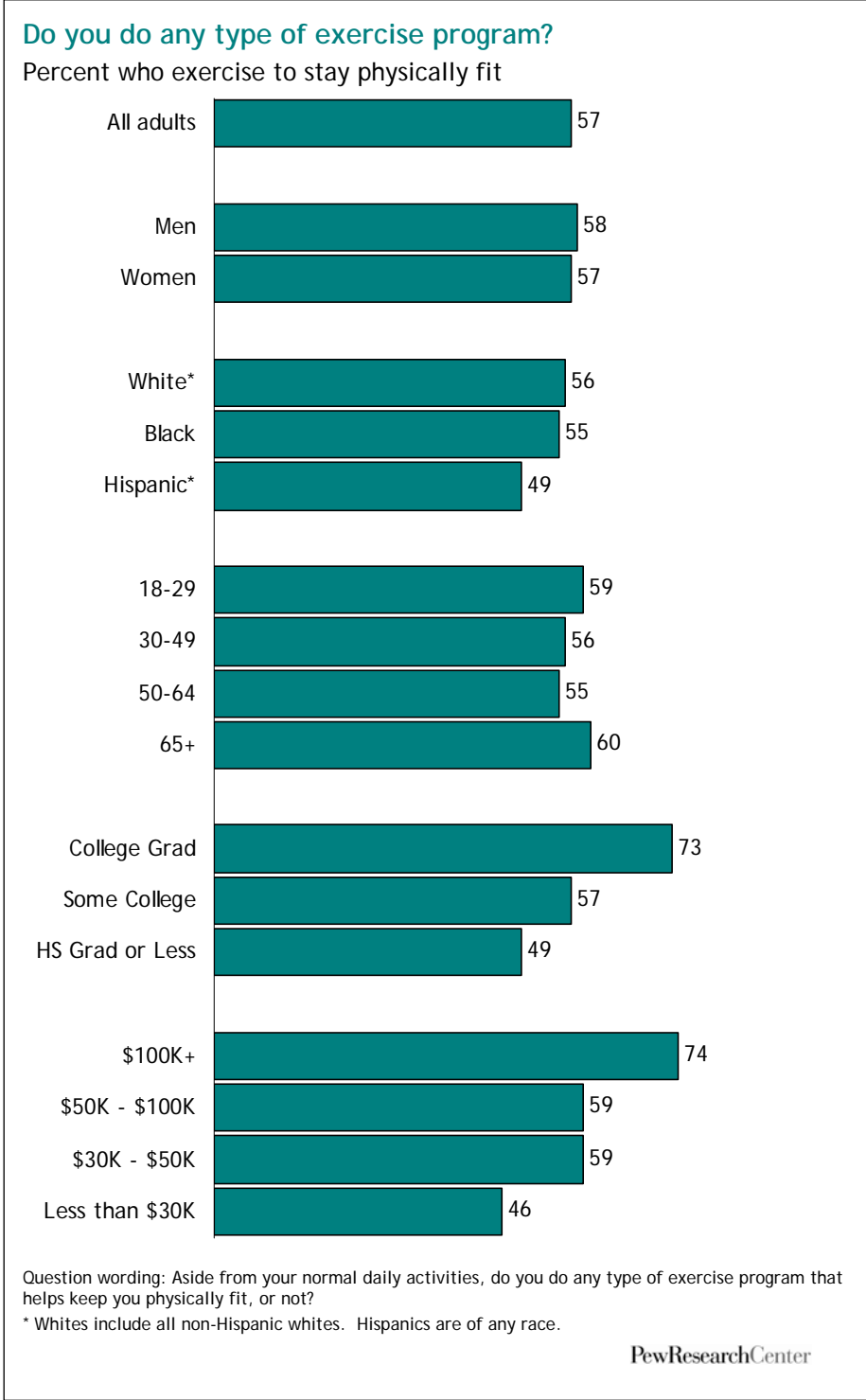
Americans are sold on the value of exercise. More than eight-in-ten (86%) believe exercising for fitness improves a person’s odds of a long and healthy life by “a lot.” And, about six-in-ten believe that exercising has “a lot” of impact on a person’s attractiveness. But just 28% report that they get as much physical exercise as they should. There is no demographic or weight classification group in which a majority feels they get as much exercise as they should.

Some 57% of Americans report that they do some type of exercise program to keep physically fit. Even among this group, however, just 34% say they’re getting as much exercise as they should while 65% think they should be getting more.

Those who are currently dieting are more likely than those not currently dieting to also be exercising. The

overweight may need exercise more but they are less likely to be doing it compared with those who are about the right weight. About half (53%) of those who consider themselves overweight are exercising; the comparable figure among those who consider their weight about right is 61%.

Both men and women, young and old are about equally likely to be exercising. Those with more education and higher incomes are more likely than their counterparts to take part in an exercise program. There are modest



differences in exercising by race and ethnicity; Hispanics are less likely than non-Hispanic whites to exercise while blacks and whites are about equally likely to do so.

What keeps people out of the gym?

One impediment to more physical activity may be the fun factor. There is a strong correlation between enjoyment of exercise and doing it. Among those who enjoy exercising a great deal, 85% take part in an exercise program; this figure drops to 68% among those who say they enjoy exercising “a fair amount” and to just 37% among those who are less enthusiastic about exercise.

Exercising is correlated with self-ratings of health and physical fitness. Seven-in-ten of those who rate their health as excellent say they have an exercise program. More than three quarters (77%) of those who rate their physical fitness as excellent have an exercise program and a majority of this group enjoys exercising “a great deal.” This is the only group in which a clear majority (62%) reports that they get about as much exercise as they should.

How much do we need to lose?

The Pew survey finds that Americans would like to be thinner than they are – on average, about 16 pounds thinner. Women would like to lose more weight than men; the average woman says she is 18 pounds above her ideal weight, while the average man says he is 14 pounds above his ideal weight. Also, the middle-aged would like to lose more weight than would either the young or the old.

What We Weigh and What We’d Like to Weigh

Differences between self-reported weight and ideal weight, by demographics

	Average Current Weight	Average Ideal Weight	Average Amount Over Ideal
All adults	172	156	+16 lbs.
Gender			
Men	192	178	+14 lbs.
Women	153	136	+18 lbs.
Race and Ethnicity			
White*	174	158	+16 lbs.
Black	174	158	+16 lbs.
Hispanic*	165	149	+18 lbs.
Age			
18-29	165	154	+11 lbs.
30-49	174	158	+17 lbs.
50-64	182	159	+22 lbs.
65 and older	165	152	+13 lbs.
Education			
College graduate	169	156	+13 lbs.
Some college	174	155	+17 lbs.
High school graduate or less	173	157	+17 lbs.
Family Income			
\$100,000 or more	173	161	+13 lbs.
\$50,000 to \$99,999	175	159	+15 lbs.
\$30,000 to \$49,999	171	156	+14 lbs.
Under \$30,000	172	152	+21 lbs.
Region			
Northeast	169	153	+15 lbs.
Midwest	178	160	+18 lbs.
South	172	156	+16 lbs.
West	170	155	+14 lbs.
Urban/Rural			
Urban	168	155	+14 lbs.
Suburban	174	157	+17 lbs.
Rural	176	158	+18 lbs.

Both current weight and ideal weight are based on respondents’ self-reports. The average amount over ideal weight is computed for each individual; this figure does not always match the difference between the average weight and average ideal weight for each group of respondents.

*Whites include all non-Hispanic whites. Hispanics are of any race.

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There are some differences by education and income levels as well. College graduates say they have a little less weight to lose (13 pounds on average) than do those with less education. Also, those with lower incomes (under \$30,000 a year) say they need to lose more weight (21 pounds on average) than do those in the middle and upper income brackets.

There are also some modest differences by where people live. Midwesterners put themselves at about 18 pounds over their ideal weight, while Westerners say they are an average of 14 pounds too heavy. Similarly, those in rural areas consider themselves an average of 18 pounds heavier than ideal, while suburbanites say they need to lose 17 pounds on average and urban residents say they need to lose 14 pounds.

Not surprisingly, those who consider themselves very overweight would like to lose a lot more weight (87 pounds) than would those who consider their weight about right (5 pounds).

We computed these differences between actual weight and ideal weight by asking respondents first to state what they weigh and then to state what they considered their ideal weight. More than six-in-ten of the respondents (63%) gave a current weight that was heavier than their ideal weight, while 16 percent said both figures were the same and 12 percent said their ideal weight was *greater* than their current weight.

But while 63% said their actual weight was greater than their ideal weight, just 39% of adults in this same survey said, in response to a different question, that they considered themselves overweight.

The apparent explanation for this disparity is that almost a quarter (24%) of all adults say they are no more than 10 pounds over their ideal weight. And most of the people in this “near-ideal” group describe themselves as being just about the right weight rather than being overweight.

What We Weigh and What We’d Like to Weigh

Differences between self-reported weight and ideal weight, by weight, diet, and exercise

	Average Current Weight	Average Ideal Weight	Average Amount Over Ideal
All adults	172	156	+16 lbs.
Self-Description as...			
Overweight	198	161	+36 lbs.
Very	246	157	+87 lbs.
Somewhat	204	166	+37 lbs.
A little	180	158	+22 lbs.
About right	158	153	+5 lbs.
Worry about weight			
All/Some of the time	180	155	+25 lbs.
Not too often/never	167	157	+9 lbs.
Diet, Exercise			
Dieting	188	159	+29 lbs.
Not dieting	167	155	+12 lbs.
Exercising	170	157	+14 lbs.
Not exercising	175	155	+20 lbs.
Diet, Exercise Combined			
Exercising only	165	156	+8 lbs.
Doing both	184	158	+27 lbs.
Dieting only	197	160	+35 lbs.
Doing Neither	170	154	+16 lbs.

Both current weight and ideal weight are based on respondents' self-reports. The average amount over ideal weight is computed for each individual; this figure does not always match the difference between the average weight and average ideal weight for each group of respondents.

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About the Pew Social Trends Reports

The Pew social trends reports explore the behaviors and attitudes of Americans in key realms of their lives – family, community, health, finance, work and leisure. Reports analyze changes over time in social behaviors and probe for differences and similarities between key sub-groups in the population.

The surveys are conducted by the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan “fact tank” that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

Survey reports are the result of the collaborative effort of the social trends staff, which consists of:

Paul Taylor, Executive Vice President

Cary Funk, Senior Project Director

Peyton Craighill, Project Director

Related Reports from the Pew Research Center

Americans See Weight Problems Everywhere But In the Mirror. April 2006. Pew Research Center.

<http://pewresearch.org/social>

Eating More: Enjoying Less. April 2006. Pew Research Center. <http://pewresearch.org/social>

About the Survey

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted with a nationally representative sample of adults, ages 18 years and older, living in continental U.S. telephone households.

- Interviews conducted February 8- March 7, 2006
- 2,250 interviews
- Margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points for results based on the total sample at the 95% confidence level. The margin of sampling error is higher for results based on subgroups of respondents.

Survey interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

In addition to sampling error, bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias in the findings of opinion polls.

**PEW SOCIAL TRENDS
FINAL TOPLINE
FEBRAURY 8 - MARCH 7, 2006
N=2,250**

QUESTIONS 1 – 2 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

Q.3 How would you rate your own health in general these days? Would you say your health is excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

	Oct ² <u>2005</u>	June <u>2003</u>	Mid-July <u>1990</u>
29 Excellent	30	28	27
51 Good	48	52	53
15 Only fair	17	15	15
5 Poor	5	5	5
* Don't know/Refused	*	*	*
100	100	100	100

Q.4 And, how physically fit are you now? Would you say you are in excellent physical condition, good condition, only fair condition, or poor condition?

	July <u>1990</u>
13 Excellent	11
54 Good	58
26 Only fair	24
7 Poor	6
* Don't know/Refused	*
100	100

QUESTIONS 5 – 37 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

NO QUESTIONS 38 - 41

ASK ALL:

On a different topic...

Q.42 Right now, do you feel that you are overweight, underweight, or just about the right weight for you?

ASK IF OVERWEIGHT (Q42=1):

Q.43 Do you feel you are very overweight, somewhat overweight, or only a little overweight?

	July 1990
39 Overweight	42
5 <i>Very</i>	6
16 <i>Somewhat</i>	13
18 <i>Only a little</i>	23
* <i>Don't know/Refused</i>	*
3 Underweight	5
57 Just about right	53
1 Don't know/Refused	*
100	100

² All trends reference surveys from the Pew Research Center unless otherwise noted.

ASK ALL:

Q.44 What is your approximate current weight?

ENTER NUMBER OF POUNDS (ROUND TO NEAREST POUND)

		----- Gallup -----									
		<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Jul</u>	<u>Jul</u>	<u>Oct</u>
				<u>2005</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>1990</u>
9	124 lbs. or less	1	16	9	8	8	9	8	8	11	12
21	125-149 lbs.	9	31	19	19	21	22	20	19	19	27
24	150-174 lbs.	24	25	24	25	21	22	24	26	25	27
17	175-199 lbs.	25	9	19	20	22	18	22	20	20	16
23	200 lbs and over	38	10	25	24	24	25	22	22	20	15
<u>6</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>3</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
172	Mean weight in pounds	192	153	173	173	174	173	171	173	170	161
167	Median weight in pounds	185	145								

QUESTIONS 45 IN PREVIOUS RELEASE

Q.46 What do you think is the IDEAL body weight for you, personally?

ENTER NUMBER OF POUNDS (ROUND TO NEAREST POUND)

		----- Gallup -----									
		<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Jul</u>	<u>Oct</u>	
				<u>2005</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>1990</u>	
13	124 lbs. or less	1	24	14	13	12	15	11	13	18	
29	125-149 lbs.	9	47	27	30	33	28	31	31	32	
24	150-174 lbs.	31	18	26	26	21	24	26	23	24	
18	175-199 lbs.	33	4	19	19	20	18	20	19	16	
10	200 lbs and over	20	1	10	10	12	11	9	12	6	
<u>6</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	
156	Mean ideal weight	178	136	157	156	157	157	156	157	149	
150	Median ideal weight	176	133								

IDEAL WEIGHT (Q.44 - Q.46) Difference between current weight and ideal weight.

		<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Gallup</u>
				<u>Nov 2005</u>
12	Under ideal weight	15	9	11
<i>1</i>	<i>More than 20 lbs.</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>3</i>	<i>11-20 lbs.</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>8</i>	<i>1-10 lbs.</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>6</i>
16	At ideal weight	17	15	18
63	Over ideal weight	61	64	65
<i>24</i>	<i>1-10 lbs.</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>15</i>	<i>11-20 lbs.</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>18</i>	<i>21-50 lbs.</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>6</i>	<i>More than 50 lbs.</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
<u>9</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>7</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>6</u>
100		100	100	100
16.1	Mean difference in pounds	14.3	17.8	16.5
10.0	Median difference in pounds	10.0	10.0	

B.1 How often do you worry about your weight? Would you say you worry all of the time, some of the time, not too often, or never?

		----- Gallup -----		
		<u>July 2005</u>	<u>July 1999</u>	<u>Oct 1990</u>
14	All the time	15	15	7
28	Some of the time	34	27	27
30	Not too often	29	34	33
27	Never	22	24	33
<u>1</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL. DO NOT READ)	<u>0</u>	<u>*</u>	<u>*</u>
100		100	100	100

Q.47 Aside from your normal daily activities, do you do any type of exercise program that helps keep you physically fit, or not?

		<u>July 1990</u>
57	Yes	59
43	No	41
<u>*</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>*</u>
100		100

Q.48 How much do you enjoy exercising? **(READ)**

23	A great deal
29	A fair amount
23	Some
15	Not too much
9	Or, not at all
<u>1</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL. DO NOT READ)
100	

Q.49 Do you feel that you probably get as much physical exercise as you should, or do you feel you should probably be getting more physical exercise?

		<i>Harvard School of Public Health</i>	<i>ABC News/ Time Magazine</i>
		<u>June 2005</u>	<u>May 2004</u>
28	Get as much as you should	34	29
70	Should be getting more	66	71
<u>2</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL. DO NOT READ)	<u>*</u>	<u>*</u>
100		100	100

ROTATE Q50A and Q50B

Q.50A How much do you think exercising for physical fitness can improve a person's chances for a long and healthy life — a lot, a little, or not at all?

		<u>July 1990</u>
86	A lot	73
11	A little	22
1	Not at all	2
1	It depends (VOL.)	2
<u>1</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL. DO NOT READ)	<u>1</u>
100		100

Q.50B How much do you think exercising for physical fitness affects a person's attractiveness—a lot, a little, or not at all?

- 59 A lot
 - 31 A little
 - 6 Not at all
 - 2 It depends (VOL.)
 - 2 Don't know/Refused (VOL. DO NOT READ)
- 100

QUESTIONS 51A – 51B IN PREVIOUS RELEASE

Q.52 Are you currently trying to lose weight through some kind of special effort on your part, such as a special diet or exercise program?

ASK IF DIETING (Q52=1):

Q.53 Are you currently following any particular weight-loss diet plan, or not? **IF YES:** Which one?

- 25 Yes, dieting
 - 6 *Using a specific plan (SPECIFY)*
 - 19 *No plan*
 - * *Don't know/Refused*
 - 75 Not dieting
 - * Don't know/Refused (VOL. DO NOT READ)
- 100

ASK ALL:

Q.54 Have you ever lost more than 5 pounds through some kind of special effort on your part, such as a special diet or exercise program?

IF YES (Q54=1):

Q.55 Did you keep that weight off for at least a year?

*Great American
TV Poll #2
Jan 1991*

- | | | |
|----------|--|----------|
| 52 | Yes, lost weight from a diet | 57 |
| 39 | <i>Yes, kept weight off for a year</i> | 43 |
| 12 | <i>No, did not</i> | 14 |
| 1 | <i>Don't know/Refused</i> | * |
| 47 | No | 43 |
| <u>1</u> | Don't know/Refused (VOL.) | <u>0</u> |
- 100

QUESTIONS 56 – 57 IN PREVIOUS RELEASE

Q.58 About how often in an average week do you eat a meal at any restaurant? **DO NOT READ**

		<i>ABC News/ Time Magazine</i>
		<u>May 2004</u>
13	Never	14
20	Less than weekly	17
33	1 time a week	30
15	2 times a week	16
8	3 times a week	9
3	4 times a week	4
3	5 times a week	4
4	6 times a week or more	7
<u>1</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL. DO NOT READ)	<u>*</u>
100		100

**QUESTIONS 59 – 69 IN PREVIOUS RELEASE
NO QUESTION 70**

ASK ALL:

Q.71 For each item I name, please tell me how important this is as a reason many Americans are very overweight—very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important. First, **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]**?

IF NECESSARY: Is this a very important, somewhat important, not too important or not at all important reason many Americans are very overweight?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not too important	Not at all important	Don't know
a. Genetics and hereditary factors	32	48	11	5	4=100
b. The kinds of foods marketed at restaurants and grocery stores	50	35	7	5	3=100
c. Lack of willpower about what to eat	59	31	5	2	3=100
d. Not getting enough physical exercise	75	20	2	1	2=100

NO QUESTIONS 72 - 74

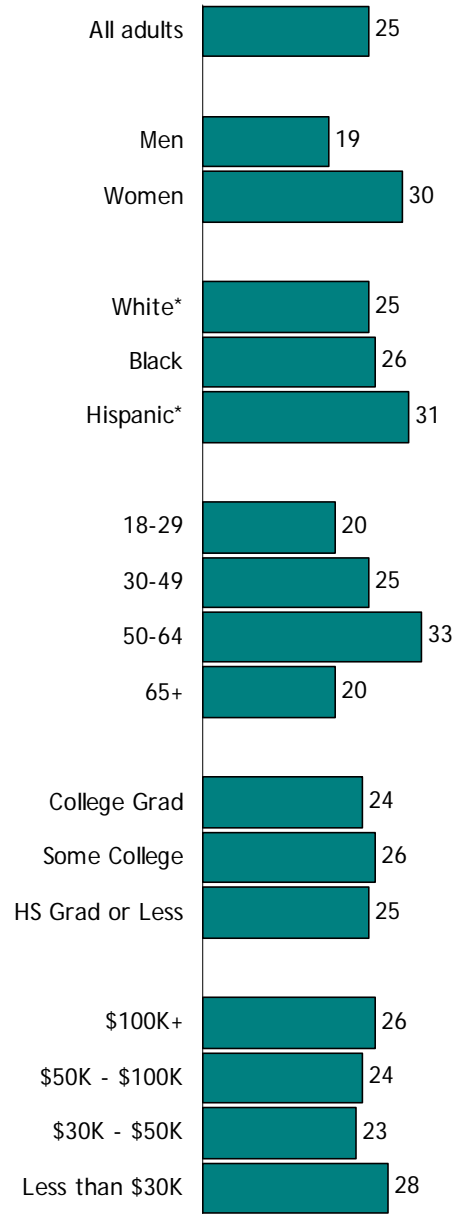
Q.75 How easy or hard do you think it is for most people who are very overweight to lose weight (**READ**)?

2	Very easy	
3	Easy	
34	Hard	
59	Very hard	
<u>2</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.—DO NOT READ)	
100		

**QUESTIONS 76 – 78 IN PREVIOUS RELEASE
QUESTIONS 79 – 90 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

Are you currently dieting?

Percent who are currently dieting

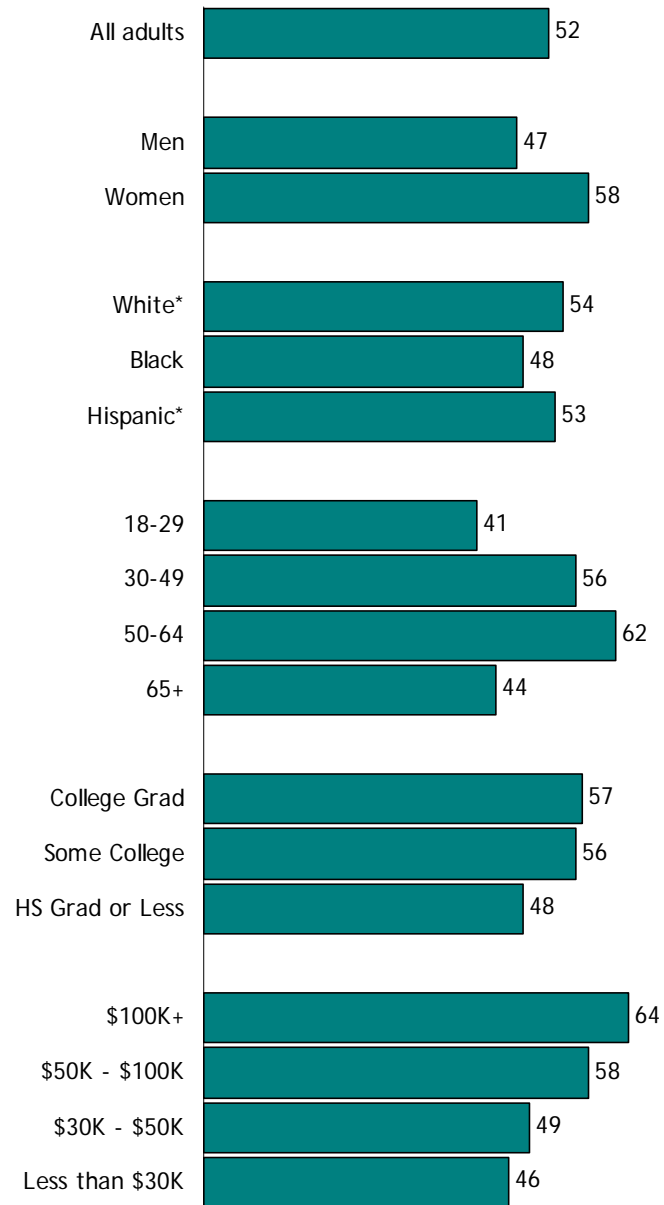


Question wording: Are you currently trying to lose weight through some kind of special effort on your part, such as a special diet or exercise program?

* Whites include all non-Hispanic whites. Hispanics are of any race.

Have you ever lost more than 5 pounds through dieting?

Percent who have ever dieted



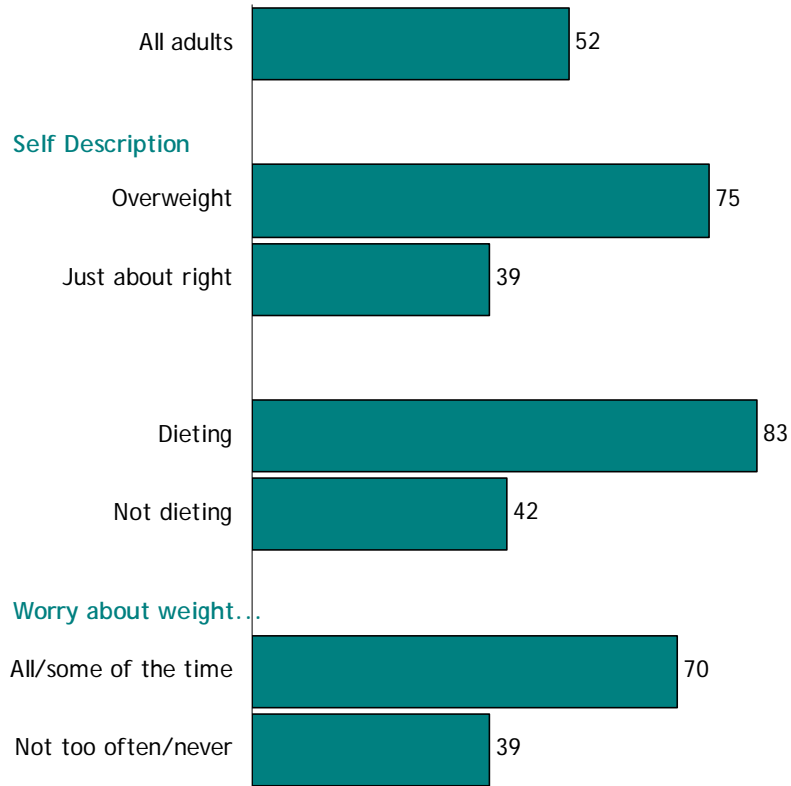
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Have you ever lost more than 5 pounds through dieting?

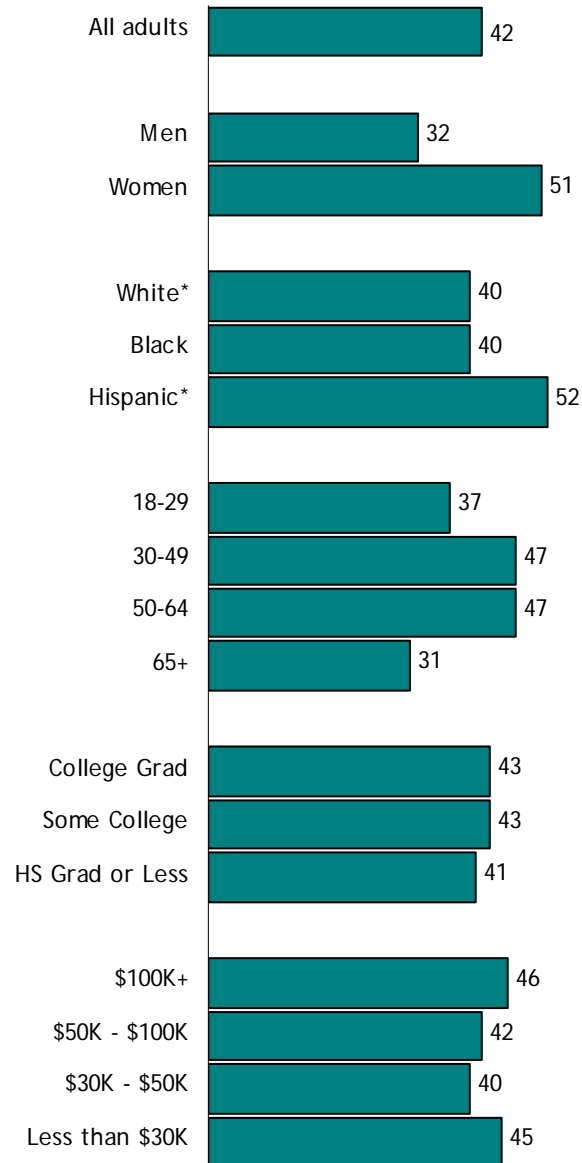
Percent who have ever dieted



Question wording: Have you ever lost more than 5 pounds through some kind of special effort on your part, such as a special diet or exercise program?

How often do you worry about your weight?

Percent who worry about their weight all or some of the time

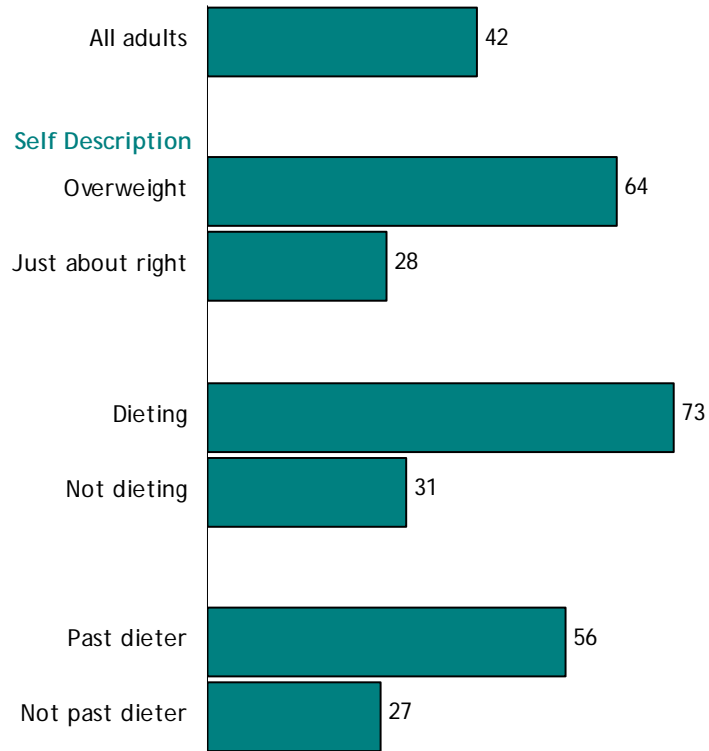


Question wording: How often do you worry about your weight? Would you say you worry all of the time, some of the time, not too often, or never?

* Whites include all non-Hispanic whites. Hispanics are of any race.

How often do you worry about your weight?

Percent who worry about their weight all or some of the time



Question wording: How often do you worry about your weight? Would you say you worry all of the time, some of the time, not too often, or never?

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The Benefits of Exercise

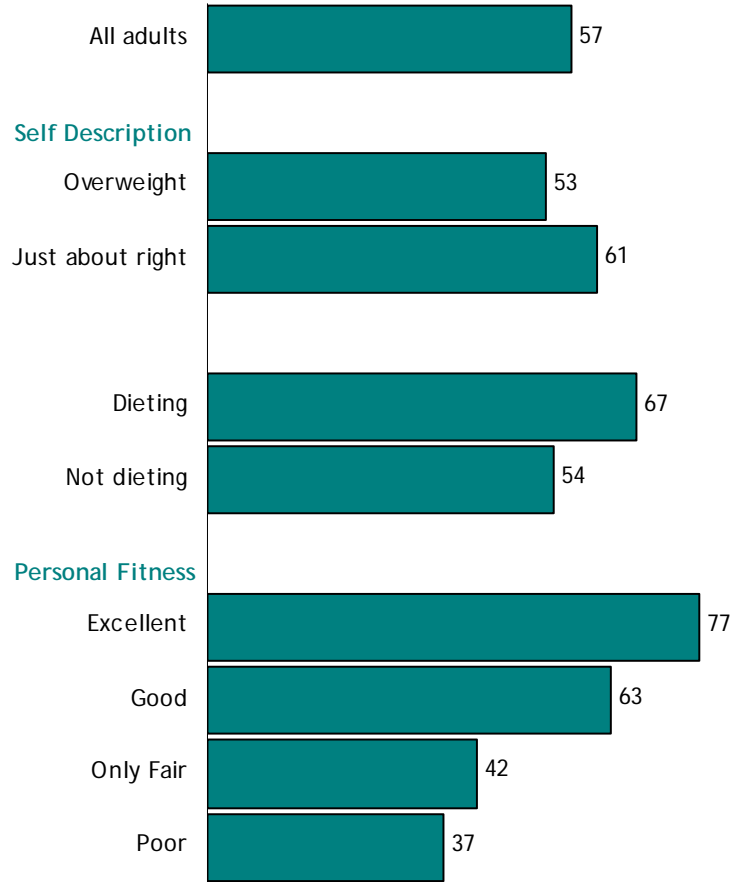
The impact of exercising for physical fitness on...

How much do you think exercising can impact...	Long and Healthy Life	
	Life	Attractiveness
	%	%
A lot	86	59
A little	11	31
Not at all	1	6
It depends (vol.)	1	2
Don't know	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>
	100	100

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Do you do any type of exercise program?

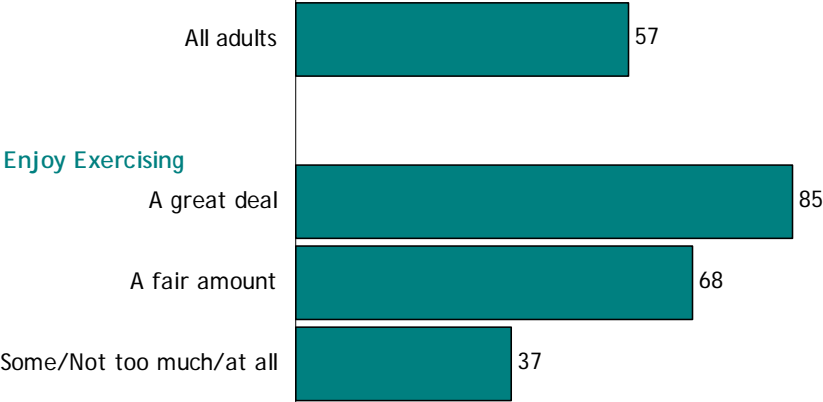
Percent who exercise to stay physically fit



Question wording: Aside from your normal daily activities, do you do any type of exercise program that helps keep you physically fit, or not?

You Like It, You Do It

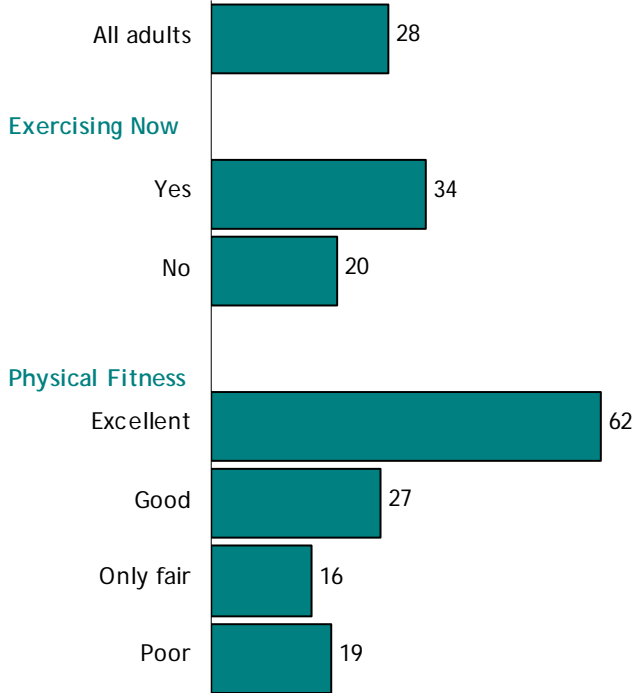
Percent who exercise to stay physically fit



Question wording: Aside from your normal daily activities, do you do any type of exercise program that helps keep you physically fit, or not?

Do you get as much exercise as you should?

Percent who get as much exercise as they feel they should



Question wording: Do you feel that you probably get as much physical exercise as you should, or do you feel you should probably be getting more physical exercise?