

Who Loves Junk Food the Most: U.K., USA, or Canada?

- **Which Country Loves Fast Food the Most?**

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Global broadcaster **BBC World** and leading market research firm Synovate today released survey results that showed Britons are more addicted to fast food than any other nation. Forty five percent of UK respondents agreed with the statement 'I like the taste of fast food too much to give it up'.

Synovate's CEO for the United Kingdom, Michelle Norman, says the United States' place as the world's epicentre of fast food is no longer a given.

"We have revealed the UK as the world's leading fast food nation – but only just. Britons love their butties, but only beat the Americans to the punch on fast food addiction by the small margin of one percent. A hefty 44% of Americans cannot give up burgers, pizza and wings," she says.

Jeremy Nye, head of audiences BBC World says the two companies engaged in the study to see how people from different cultures managed food and weight issues and their thoughts on the obesity epidemic.

"Many people are turning their thoughts to losing some pounds in the New Year. This survey shows how people tackle the issue across the world," he says.

In a series of three special reports on BBC World this week, the BBC's medical correspondent Fergus Walsh will be exploring the long term health and economic implications of obesity around the world.

The survey looks at weight management among more than 9,000 respondents across 13 countries on five continents - United Kingdom, France, Czech Republic, Romania, United States, Canada, Brazil, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Australia. Additional questions on obesity were asked in the UK only.

Overall, the survey shows that across the world people have conflicting attitudes and behaviours when it comes to managing their weight.

Michelle Norman says that these conflicts can be seen across cultures as well as within individuals.

"People are inherently contradictory and nowhere is it more obvious than on such a sensitive and important issue as their weight. The results show there's a world of people who cannot deny themselves that hamburger or extra piece of pizza, but probably make themselves feel better by washing it down with a diet cola," she says.

Off-the-scale behaviour

Seven percent of Britons weigh themselves every day and more than a third do so on a regular basis (35% weigh themselves once a week or more). A quarter don't weigh themselves at all.

"We wanted to see whether people were habitually thinking about their weight and monitoring it," Michelle Norman says.

Around a third of all global respondents are regular scale-dwellers, while one in five people never weigh themselves. Half of all Americans and the French check their weight once a week or more and the Singaporeans are the least weight-obsessed with 37% never stepping on the scales.

Obesity: A weighty issue

Obesity is a global issue. It is reaching epidemic proportions in developed nations and many developing countries now also have problems.

Synovate asked people what they believed the main cause of obesity is, and found that 40% of people across the globe attribute food as the culprit - 20% chose 'unhealthy food choices' and another 20% chose 'unhealthy food habits like eating at irregular hours'. A further 18% say it is 'lack of exercise', 13% blame the individual ('no self-discipline') and 11% say 'genetics'.

The top three answers in the UK were 'unhealthy food choices' at 27%, 'lack of exercise' at 22% and 'no self-discipline' at 21%.

Michelle Norman said that people in the UK (21%) and US (20%), two of the nations with the biggest issues, are most likely to nominate 'no self-discipline' as the leading factor in obesity.

"The Synovate and BBC World study went on to ask Britons what should be done to tackle obesity and a very significant 61% said it was up to individuals to take action. We might be big in Britain - but we are also big on blaming ourselves," she says.

One in four Brits nominated 'reduce or restrict the marketing of unhealthy fast foods' as the main way obesity should be addressed and a further 11% said 'more government education' would make all the difference.

Jeremy Nye says respondents in the UK were also asked about the risks of obesity.

"We wanted to know just how much awareness there is across Britain about the potential effects of obesity. There was almost universal awareness of obesity raising the risk of heart disease (96%) and people were also well informed about the potential risks of high blood pressure (86%) and diabetes (85%).

"However there's more education to be done when it comes to links to stroke (79% know obesity is a risk factor), infertility (47%) and cancer (40%)," he says.

Food as fuel or pleasure?

The global study asked a series of attitudinal questions which respondents agreed or disagreed with. Michelle Norman says this was the clincher in realising just how conflicted people seem to be about food.

"More than half of all Brits (54%) agreed that life is too short to deny yourself, 44% tend to eat junk food when they are down and 60% agreed they are yo-yo eaters – healthy and unhealthy by turn. On the other hand, nearly half say 'I watch my food intake carefully and strive to be healthy' and 70% believe that healthy food makes them feel better. This is the crux of food issues across the globe. People are torn by food as fuel versus food as pleasure," she says.

Losing it

The survey asked what steps people took when their weight creeps past a certain threshold.

When zippers are stretching, more people choose to address weight issues with measures related to food rather than exercise. The most popular choice in the UK was 'reduce food intake' at 54%, followed by 'change the types of food that you eat' at 45% and 'increase physical activity' at 44%.

A lucky 17% of Brits say their weight does not change and 8% try tackling the problem with herbs or supplements.

Home gyms, low-fat foods and weight loss programmes

The study asked respondents whether they were using a series of measures to either reduce or maintain their weight. Despite the growing girth of many nations, the most popular choice was using none of these measures at all at 40% - a third of Brits fell into this category.

However, 43% of people in Britain employ low-fat food products in their weight management regime and 30% use home exercise equipment. Tackling exercise at home was most prevalent in the United States and United Arab Emirates (one third of all people do this), Canada (31%) and United Kingdom (30%).

Bulging Brits also try gym memberships and trainers (23%), meal replacements such as shakes and bars (14%) and low-carbohydrate foods (14%).

Weight loss courses and memberships like WeightWatchers™, Jenny Craig™ and their ilk are most popular in the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia (10% of respondents are using or have used them) and Australia at 9%.