

OECD says Australians take too many pills and must tackle nation's obesity problem

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Australia is a nation of overweight pill poppers, according to a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

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It is warning Australia it must do something about its obesity problem. Health experts fear the next generation could be the first to live shorter lives than their parents if nothing is done.

The [Health at a Glance 2013](#) report also shows Australia had the third-highest rate in the OECD of foreign objects being left in people after surgery, as well as higher rates of obstetric trauma.

Professor of Health Policy at Curtin University Mike Daube said Australia was in "policy denial" about obesity. Politicians were refusing to tackle the problem.

"We aren't just fat," Professor Daube said. "We are on the medal podium - one of the fattest countries in the world. We have a top-class health system, we are smoking less, we eat a lot of fruit and vegetables and our life expectancy is now around 82 - but much of this progress is being put at risk because of our dismal failure to deal with obesity."

According to the report, more than 28 per cent of Australians are obese, compared with just under 25 per cent in Britain, which appeared to have reined in growth of over the past 10 years.

The report found Australians are given more cholesterol medication, known as statins, than anywhere else in the OECD. Prescribing rates were 40 per cent above average. Anti-blood pressure medication use is below average.

It was also the second-highest prescriber of anti-depressant medication; the rate has doubled over the past decade.

University of Sydney Professor of Psychopharmacology Iain McGregor said the sharp rise in anti-depressant use showed "something serious about the fabric of our society and other like societies".

"Anti-depressants are given out like candy, but they are not innocuous," Professor McGregor said. "We all know someone whose life has been saved or turned around by medication, but if you have mild or moderate depression, or have had a couple of nasty life events, generally the data says you are better off seeing a psychologist."

Despite these high prescribing rates, the most mentally unwell, those hospitalised with schizophrenia and bipolar conditions, had worse outcomes, being more likely bounce in and out of emergency care.

The report found Australia had 8.6 cases of foreign objects left in their bodies after surgery per 100,000 people who leave hospital. This compared to an average of five, although it noted Australia might have better reporting of incidents.

And while Australian women are more likely to have caesareans, when they do give birth vaginally they are more likely to experience obstetric trauma.

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/oecd-says-australians-take-too-many-pills-and-must-tackle-nations-obesity->