



Press release

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Swiss Health Survey 2017

Number of smokers has remained stable for 10 years, change in alcohol consumption behaviour

Neuchâtel, 30 October 2018 (FSO) – In 2017, 85% of the Swiss population aged 15 or over felt that they were in good health. 27% were smokers. This figure was lower than in 1992 but just as high as in 2007. Four in five people drank alcohol and one in ten did so on a daily basis. The percentage of the population that was overweight or obese stabilised at 42%. These are the most important findings from the Swiss Health Survey from 2017 published by the Federal Statistical Office (FSO). The survey highlights how the population's health behaviour and health has changed over the past 25 years.

The Swiss population's own assessment of its health is predominantly good. In 2017, 85% described their health as very good or good. There was a clear trend by age: over 93% of younger people aged 15 to 44 said they were healthy, among persons aged 75 and over this figure was 67%. One in four had been mildly or severely limited in their everyday activities for at least six months due to a health problem. Among the older population aged 65 and over, high blood pressure (47%), high cholesterol levels (32%) and diabetes (11%) were common health problems.

Percentage of smokers remained unchanged

While the share of smokers fell from 1997 to 2007, in the last 10 years it has remained at around 27%. The share of smokers was highest among men aged 15 to 44 with 35%. However, the amount of tobacco consumed has fallen. The percentage of smokers who smoked 20 or more cigarettes per day, for instance, fell by half between 1992 and 2017 (1992: 41%; 2017: 21%).

Less alcohol consumed daily

In 2017, 82% of the population drank alcohol. The share of teetotalers remained roughly the same as in 1992 and the number of people drinking alcohol every day has halved in the past 25 years (from 20% to 11%). However, this was not the case for all age groups. Among persons aged 65 and over,

the share of people drinking alcohol every day was greatest, and has been at this level since 1992 (1992: 29%; 2017: 26%).

More alcohol consumed on individual occasions

Alcohol consumption behaviour has changed over time: the population tends to drink alcohol less often than previously. However, people tend to drink more than before on single occasions. Particularly among young people and adults up to age 34, heavy episodic alcohol consumption, also known as binge drinking, is commonplace: the share of people drinking 5 (for men) or 4 (for women) glasses of an alcoholic drink within a few hours at least once a month increased from 19% in 2007 to 24% in 2017. Especially among young women aged 15 to 24, heavy episodic alcohol consumption almost doubled over this period (from 12% in 2007 to 24% in 2017).

Health as a lifestyle choice: physical activity

A healthy lifestyle has become fashionable. Among men, the number who had never smoked in their lives increased between 1997 and 2017 from 38% to 45%. Since 2002, the number of people who are physically active has increased (from 62% to 76%), and the number of inactive people has fallen (from 18% to 8%). Women in particular are increasingly physically active meaning that gender differences in terms of movement are gradually disappearing. However, social differences could also be seen: persons with a tertiary diploma tended to have healthier behaviour than those with no post-compulsory training or education.

Balanced diet

Two thirds of the population paid attention to their diet and 21% satisfied the dietary recommendations for fruit and vegetable consumption – women more so than men (28% compared with 15%). Around two thirds of the population ate meat at most four times a week. This share increased by 8 percentage points compared with 1992. The frequency of meat consumption was particularly in decline among women aged between 25 and 64. Over the past 25 years, the share of women in this age group who eat meat every day has fallen by half from 20% to 10%. At the same time, the share of women who eat no meat has tripled (from 2% to 6%).

Overweight numbers stabilise

Following growth phases, in 2017 the share of overweight (BMI 25 to <30) or obese (BMI from 30) persons remained at the same level as in 2012 at 42%. Compared with 1992, the share of obese persons doubled from 5% to 11%. Men and women were almost equally obese (12% and 10%); men, however, were more frequently overweight than women (39% compared with 23%). Among obese people, there were clear social differences: people who had completed only compulsory school were more likely to be obese than those with higher qualifications (21% compared with 8%).

Sixth edition of the survey

In 2017 22 134 people were interviewed in Switzerland with questions on their state of health and health behaviour. The Swiss Health Survey has taken place every five years since 1992. Conducting the survey over time has enabled behavioural patterns to be observed over 25 years. The population's health is constantly evolving in parallel with changes in society. Here we are particularly interested in changes in different population groups.

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As a partner of the Swiss Health Survey, the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) was granted access to the publication and the press release two weeks before dissemination.