

Body Weight Perception and Contributing Weight Gain Factors in Scandinavian and American College Students

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PURPOSE: To compare the differences of weight perception and contributing weight gain factors in Swedish, Danish, and American students. **METHODS:** A survey including questions regarding self-reported height and weight, body weight perception, and perceived contributing weight gain factors was distributed to Swedish, Danish, and American college students. **RESULTS:** 287 students responded to the survey (Sweden n=94; Denmark n=97; US n=96). Based upon their self-reported height and weight, participants were classified into one of three BMI categories: underweight (BMI<18.5), normal weight (BMI =18.5-24.9), or overweight (BMI ≥25). The following chart classifies BMI for each country.

	Underweight	Normal Weight	Overweight
Sweden	n=4 (4%)	n=77 (82%)	n=13 (14%)
Denmark	n=4 (4%)	n=78 (80%)	n=15 (16%)
US	n=3 (3%)	n=56 (58%)	n=37 (39%)

Subjects were asked to classify themselves into one of three perceived categories (Underweight, Normal Weight, and Overweight). When comparing their perceptions of body weight to actual BMI, 23% of Swedish, 20% of Danish, and 20% of American students misclassified themselves. Participants were also asked to rank factors contributing to weight gain in their country. The results were as follows: 42.55% of American respondents thought lack of physical activity was a major factor, whereas 76.09% of Swedish and 62.37% of Danish respondents thought food consumption was a major factor contributing to weight gain. **CONCLUSION:** A majority of participants classified BMI correctly based on self-perception of body weight. American students attributed lack of physical activity, whereas both Swedish and Danish students attributed food consumption to be a major contributing factor to weight gain in their own country.