



Press Release

25 March 2019

4 in 10 People in Ireland Weigh Themselves at Least Once a Month

- **Young people more likely to judge their weight by ‘how they feel’ than by the scales**
- **35-54 age group most concerned about their weight**

Following a recent CSO report which highlighted that 62% of the Irish population is now either overweight or obese¹, Royal London has released findings from a recent survey which shows that 4 in 10 Irish adults weigh themselves at least once a month.

The protection specialist commissioned IReach to conduct a nationwide survey of 1,000 people, which found that more women (45%) than men (39%) jump on the scales each month.

Colette Houton, Underwriting and Claims Lead at Royal London, discussed the findings, *“The weighing scales can mean different things to different people. For some they can strike fear, for others they can be an incentive, while others don’t pay any attention to them at all. So we all have different perspectives when it comes to measuring our weight. For example, the body confidence movement taking hold across the world is teaching us that everyone can be proud of their body and nobody should be judged by themselves, or others, according to their shape or size. On the other hand however, this country is facing an obesity epidemic which is set to negatively impact our children’s futures unless we improve our diet, levels of physical activity and overall approach to health and wellbeing.*

“So it’s not surprising that, given the different and sometimes mixed messages out there, people are reacting to weight awareness in different ways. For example; 3 in 10 people stated that they never weigh themselves, while 4 in 10 stated that they look at the scales once a month or more.”

Q: How often do you weigh yourself?

	Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht /Ulster
Every day	3%	2%	4%	0%	3%	7%	6%	2%	2%	1%
2-3 times a week	7%	7%	7%	5%	10%	5%	8%	12%	5%	5%
Once a week	9%	8%	10%	4%	12%	10%	11%	7%	7%	12%
Once every 2 weeks	8%	6%	10%	8%	7%	7%	5%	12%	9%	6%
Once a month	15%	16%	14%	16%	15%	13%	16%	9%	12%	23%
A few times a year	19%	19%	20%	19%	19%	22%	20%	22%	18%	19%
Less often	9%	9%	8%	10%	7%	12%	7%	11%	8%	9%
Never - just don't think of it	16%	16%	16%	17%	16%	15%	20%	19%	14%	11%
Never - I don't think we should weigh ourselves, we should just judge how we feel	14%	17%	11%	21%	11%	9%	7%	6%	25%	14%

Royal London report that age played a role on the activity levels of respondents when it came to weighing themselves.

Colette noted, *“Not one respondent in the 18-34 age group said they weigh themselves every day, and just 5% said they weigh themselves several times a week: Although this could be seen as a good thing. Weighing oneself every day, or every few days, could suggest people are overly focused on their weight and may not have a healthy relationship between the figure they see on the scales and how they perceive themselves. The frequency increases slightly for 35-54 year olds, 13% of whom weigh themselves either every day or a few times a week, and slightly lowers again for those aged 55 plus, at 12%.*

“Interestingly it’s the younger generation who are most likely to dismiss what the scales say, and view weighing themselves as an unhealthy preoccupation. Instead, 1 in 5 18-34 year olds favour to judge their weight by how they feel. Only 11% of those in the 35–54 age bracket are of the same opinion, with less still (9%) of the over 55s holding this viewpoint.”

Obesity in Ireland

In 2017, the CSO determined that 62% of people in Ireland could be classified as overweight or obese - a rise of 2% since 2015¹. Additionally, The Irish Heart Foundation has described childhood obesity as a major threat to the health of the current generation of children and young people². This is backed up by a Health Service Executive (HSE) report which highlights that Ireland could have one of the highest rates of obesity in Europe by 2030³.

Colette continued, *“These findings portray an unpleasant picture of the current state of Ireland’s obesity epidemic, particularly amongst young people. As the HSE advises, the current health of Ireland’s children gives a good indication of what the health of our population will be in the future; so it’s important to tackle the issue now. That means getting children to eat better, reduce screen time and exercise more.”*

“The Department of Health’s National Obesity Policy and Action Plan, ‘A Healthy Weight for Ireland 2016-2025’⁴, identifies that 6 in 10 adults in Ireland are overweight or obese. This is a very worrying statistic as we now know that people who are categorised as being obese are at a significantly higher risk of suffering from many chronic diseases like heart disease, certain cancers, type 2 diabetes and respiratory problems.

“The long term ramifications of this trend are obvious. A reduction in people’s overall quality of life and productivity will put an enormous strain on the health system,

supporting social systems and economy as a whole. A 2017 study by Safefood⁵ suggested that the total lifetime cost of overweight and obese adults in Ireland is around €4.6 billion.”

Obesity and its impact on life assurance

Royal London advise that life cover is different from most insurance products because it is priced based on a number of key criteria which carefully consider the insured individual's lifestyle.

Colette explained, “Life cover is one of the few insurance products that is based specifically on a person's state of health. This usually means the healthier you are, the lower the cost of your cover. A person's medical history and lifestyle always comes into play when underwriting life assurance as the cost of cover is based not only on the sum assured and the length of the policy, but also on the individual's age, state of health and certain lifestyle factors. So for example, if you smoke, drink a lot of alcohol or are classed as obese, your premiums are likely to be higher to reflect the increased risks to insure someone that has a greater chance of medical issues and shortened life expectancy associated with smoking, liver damage and obesity.”

Life companies follow a matrix compiled by reinsurers which give ratings for specific lifestyle factors which are analysed to determine pricing.

Colette concluded, “However, it's important to note that if someone is, say, ten pounds over their 'ideal' weight, the cost of their life cover should not be affected. If an individual is looking for life cover and they'd like to know more about their how weight or lifestyle may affect it we would recommend they contact a Financial Broker. Their local Financial Broker will be happy to provide them with expert guidance around the available options based on their individual needs.”

ENDS

Notes to the Editor:

About Royal London:

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Sources:

¹ Central Statistics Office, Ireland's Facts and Figures 2018 - https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/statisticalpublications/2018/P_R_401913_Ireland's_Facts_&_Figures_2018_-_WEB.pdf

²The Irish Heart Foundation, Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children & Youth Affairs: Tackling Childhood Obesity, 2018 - https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_children_and_youth_affairs/submissions/2018/2018-08-22_submission-irish-heart-foundation_en.pdf

³Tackling Childhood Obesity, A written submission from the Health Service Executive to the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, 2018 – https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_children_and_youth_affairs/submissions/2018/2018-08-22_submission-health-service-executive_en.pdf

⁴Healthy Ireland, A Healthy Weight for Ireland, Obesity Policy and Action Plan, 2016 - <https://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/A-Healthy-Weight-for-Ireland-Obesity-Policy-and-Action-Plan-2016-2025.pdf>

⁵Safefood - New study reveals total lifetime cost of childhood overweight and obesity on the island estimated at €7.2billion euros, 2017 - <https://www.safefood.eu/News/2017/New-study-reveals-total-lifetime-cost-of-childhood.aspx>

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