

Easier to gain, harder to lose

New medications promise to revolutionise the future of weight loss, with a possible 15 – 25% loss in body weight. But to understand the potential scale of their impact, we need to understand how Britain has gained and lost weight in the past.



Different generations have had varying experiences of weight gain and loss

Three cohorts, each born a decade apart

1946

People born in 1946:
early baby boomers

1958

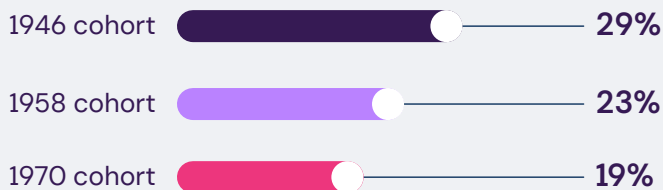
People born in 1958:
late baby boomers

1970

People born in 1970:
generation X

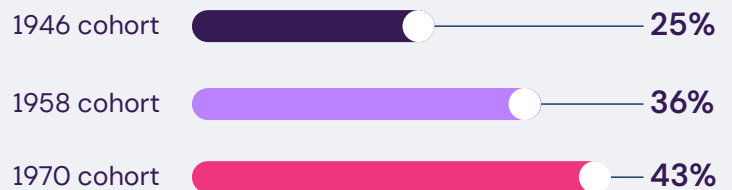
1 Fewer than 1 in 5 gen Xers have kept a healthy weight into their 50s

Kept healthy weight into early 50s



2 Almost half of gen Xers have experienced obesity during adulthood

Experienced obesity by their early 50s

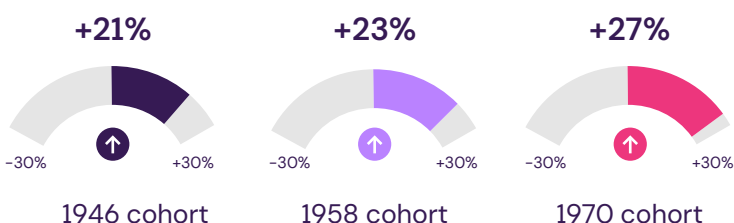


Healthy weight: BMI less than 25 kg/m², Overweight: between healthy and obesity, Obesity: BMI 30 and above

But they all have socioeconomic influences in common

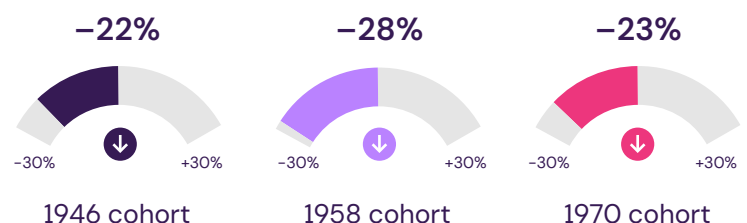
3 Those maintaining a healthy weight are more likely to have a degree

Difference from average



4 People who experienced obesity are less likely to come from well off families

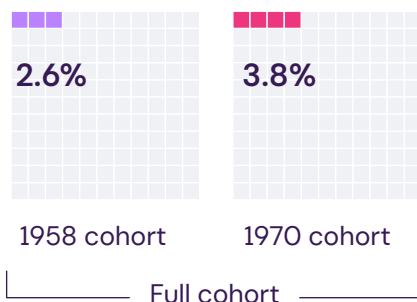
Difference from average



Most significantly there is very little weight loss

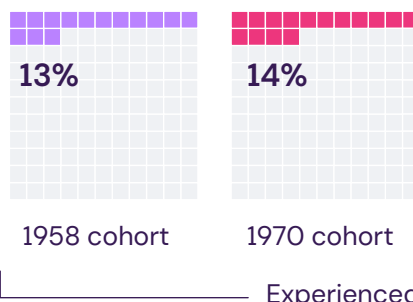
5 Slightly more gen Xers lost weight

>5% weight **loss** from obesity



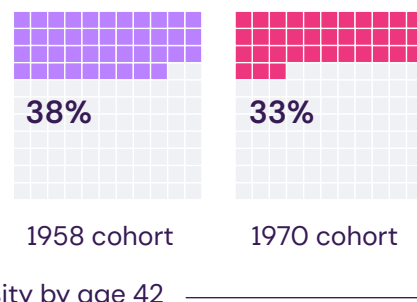
6 Few with obesity go on to lose weight

>5% weight **loss** from obesity



7 And many continued to gain weight

>5% further weight **gain** from obesity



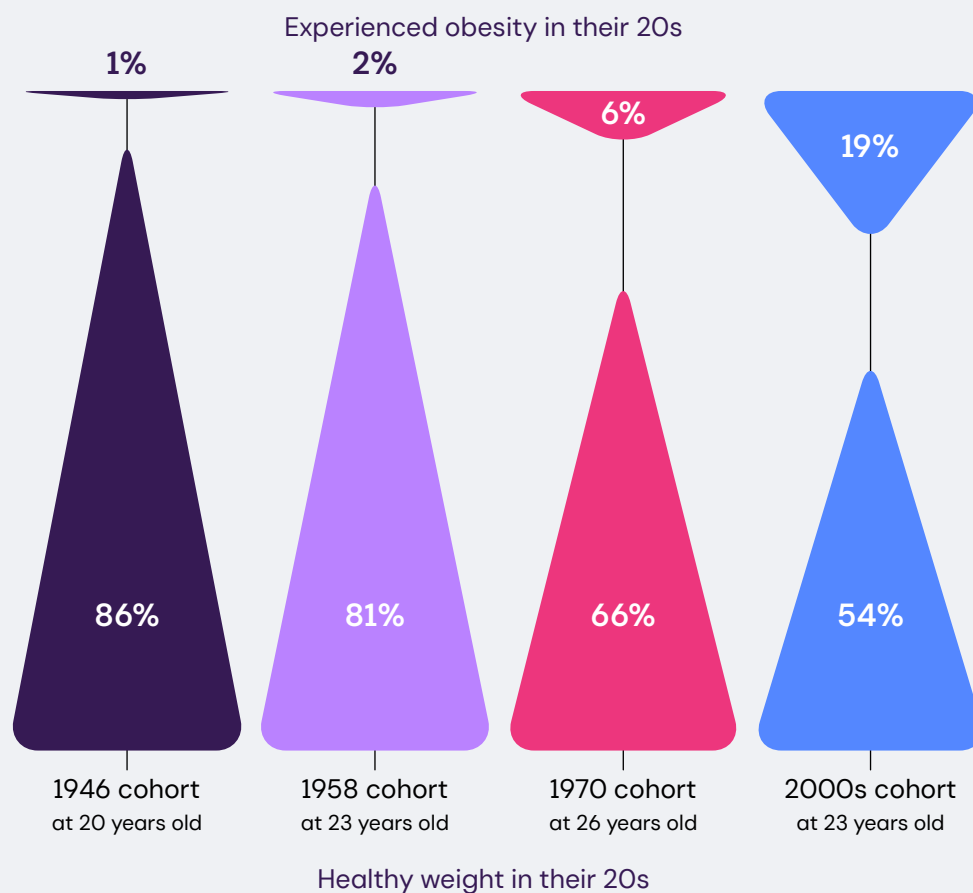
8 This has important implications for the next generation: they are starting from a much worse place

2001

People born 2000 - 2002: **gen Z**

Experienced obesity in their 20s

Healthy weight in their 20s



The pool of people who could benefit from weight loss has grown across generations, and they have found it harder to maintain a healthy weight over the long term. However, these generational differences show that lower levels of obesity are possible. While weight-loss medications can help individuals once obesity has emerged, prevention remains essential to stopping its development in the first place.

Understanding trends in previous generations will be important in helping target weight loss treatment, design obesity policy, and reduce health inequalities.