



LEO J. SHAPIRO & ASSOCIATES LLC.

*May 31, 2007*

## **Information Overload For Overweight Americans**

---

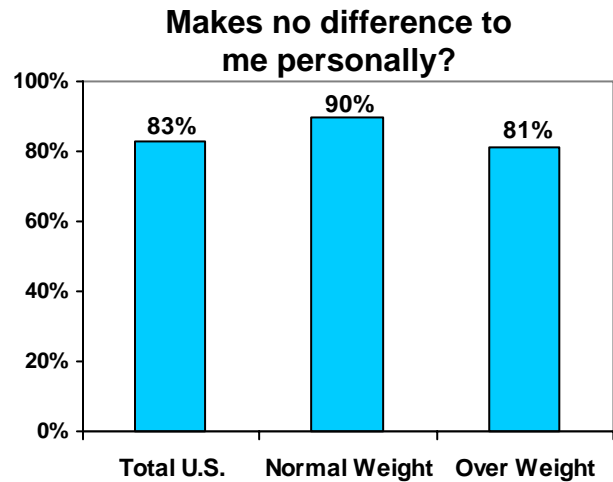
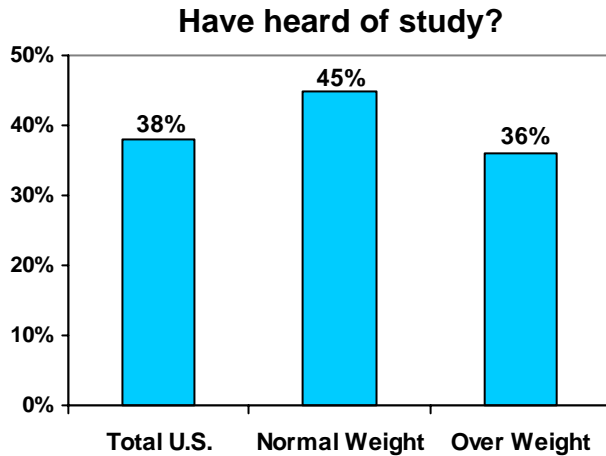
Most American adults are in an ongoing struggle to control their weight. Their struggle is associated with a profusion of information delivered almost continuously over the media, in newly published books, on food packages, and by the government advising the nation on what to eat and on the risks of obesity. If you are overweight, you are vulnerable to information overload.

The effect of information overload may not be as much a lack of attention as a lack of resolve to use the information that is supplied. This is seen dramatically in public response to research findings that overweight people may live longer. The research funded by the American Center for Disease Control and published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that life expectancy did not decline with obesity. The findings were widely publicized in the popular press during 2005.

A study conducted by Leo J. Shapiro & Associates found that within a month of the announcement 38% of U.S. adults had heard of the news. Interestingly, normal weight adults more often reported hearing the news (45%) than overweight adults (36%). Despite the startling revelation of this news, most of the overweight as well as normal weight public were indifferent to it. When told that the scientific value of the study had been praised around the world, 83% of respondents said that what the study discovered made no difference to them personally. Among normal weight respondents this percentage was 90%; among the overweight, 81%. When probed further, only 12% said that the results of the study made them feel freer about what they eat. Clearly, findings of research which materially temper the consequences of obesity, do not dissuade people from their struggle with weight. Even when a message about weight loss that could provide significant relief gets through, many people are so jaded that they do not act on the information.

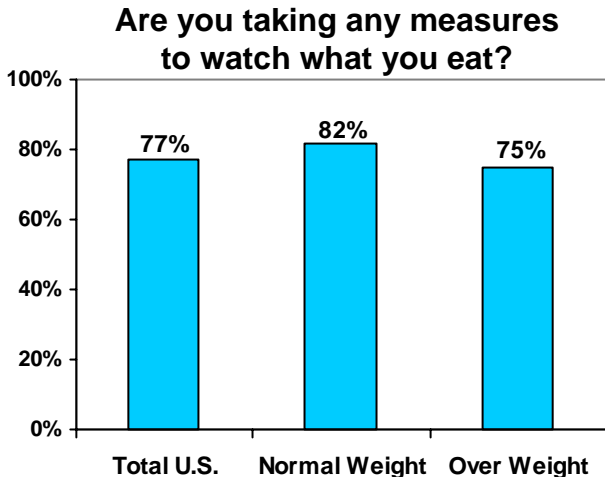
*A major study announced this month found that...overweight people have a somewhat lower death rate than normal weight people. Have you heard of this study?*

*The scientific merit of this study has been widely praised around the world. Does knowing what this study discovered make any difference to you personally?*



The Shapiro study is based on telephone interviews with 450 households projectable to the US. It found that 37% of adults were normal weight as measured by a Body Mass Index (BMI) between 18.5 and 24.9 and 60% were overweight, BMI of 30 or higher\*. Among the overweight group nearly one third (30%) were obese as classified by a BMI of 30 or higher. This means that about one in six American adults is obese. By contrast, just 3% of adults are underweight; their BMI was under 18.5.

The study also found that 77% of adults acknowledged they are taking measures to watch what they eat. This effort is more prominent among normal weight (82%) than among overweight (75%) adults.



Trying to...	Total U.S.	Normal Weight	Over Weight
Lose weight	43%	24%	57%
Maintain perfect weight	46	66	35

For the three in four overweight adults who are watching what they eat, their struggle is largely unsuccessful. They remain overweight. Many have conceded defeat and at best hope to maintain their weight so as to avoid becoming still heavier. Desire to maintain their looks – that is, vanity – contributes to the fear of gaining weight. Willingness to live with their present weight

\*Calculated by dividing a person KG weight by the square of their height in meters.

is the case, even though people are continually told to lose weight and how to do it. This helps to explain the indifference of the public to the discovery that overweight people live longer than normal weight adults. Announcement of the discovery is not ignored, but does not liberate the public from its struggle with food. At the end of the day, it is one of many messages that people are hearing about the problem of weight.

At the time of the study, perhaps the most popular message about controlling weight was the effectiveness of a low carb diet. So powerful was this message that many food manufacturers introduced low carbohydrate versions of their product. A startling 94% of adults said that they had gotten the message - had heard of low carb diets. Yet, just 16% said that they were currently on a low carb diet, and only 7% said that they planned to start one.

The largely unsuccessful effort against weight, contrary to spin about fad diets, leaves most overweight Americans unresponsive to new opportunities to lose weight. They hear the messages, but remain mostly unmoved, continuing with what they are doing now to combat their weight problem. Thus, even when research suggesting that the problem of weight may not be as life threatening as it was thought to be reaches the public, many remain unmoved and continue undeterred in their struggle with weight.

This represents a formidable market challenge to the obesity drugs being developed by pharmaceutical companies that are now moving towards market. Consumers may exert less energy on physicians to prescribe those drugs than the industry expects. It may well be that the physician and not the consumer will have to take the lead to break into current public patterns of weight control.