

Monthly Newsletter

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Health Study Emphasizes Weight Control

Recent research indicates convincingly that being overweight in middle age (40-65 years) can result in catastrophic consequences in later years, even if one's blood pressure and cholesterol levels are normal.

Northwestern University researchers tracked 17,643 individuals for three decades and found that being overweight in midlife substantially increased the risk of dying of heart disease in later life irrespective of blood pressure and cholesterol readings well within the "healthy" range.

"The common misconception is that excess weight is nothing to worry about until high blood pressure and poor cholesterol develop," according to Dr. JoAnn Manson, chief of preventive medicine at Harvard's Brigham and Women's Hospital. "But fat tissue is not like an inert storage depot – it's a very dynamic organ that is actually producing hormones and chemical messengers that can damage blood vessels, increase the risk of blood clots and cause insulin resistance that makes people prone to diabetes, all without elevating blood pressure or cholesterol."

Participants in the study were Chicago-area men and women in their mid-40's who had no heart disease or diabetes when the study began. They were followed for 32 years during which time researchers tracked deaths from cardiovascular disease and diabetes and hospitalizations for those conditions before and after age 65. Among participants with normal blood pressure and cholesterol at the start, those who were overweight were 43% more likely than normal weight participants to die of heart disease later on. They also were four times as likely to be hospitalized for heart disease, blood clots and diabetes. Standard body-mass index categories were used to define weight: BMIs of 25 to 29 were considered overweight, while 30 and above was considered obese.

According to lead researcher Dr. Lijing Yan, "The take-home message is pay serious attention to your weight even if you don't have an unhealthy risk factor profile yet. Real damage can be brewing under the radar." The study appears in the January, 2006 *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Did you know that your EAP offers special wellness benefits that can assist you in losing weight and achieving greater health? Check out the Lifestyle Benefits at your EAP Web site (www.theEAP.com) where you will discover special offers and discounts from several of the nation's most respected companies including Bally's Total Fitness®, Jenny Craig®, SmokEnders® and Workouts for You®. Your future good health lies in the balance!