



# Facts on Aging: Obesity in Aging

The Pepper Institute on Aging and Public Policy

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***Obesity has reached epidemic proportions in the United States. Nearly one-third of U.S. adults are considered obese, some 15 million of those are older adults – people over the age of 51. This represents nearly one in four older adults. While obesity itself is not a chronic condition, it is a risk factor for many chronic conditions, including coronary heart disease, type II diabetes, stroke and several forms of cancer. Lifestyle changes, more exercise and a healthier diet are important factors in the battle of the bulge – at any age.***

### Who is Obese? \_\_\_\_\_

- Obesity refers specifically to having an abnormally high proportion of body fat. A person can be overweight without being obese, as in the example of a bodybuilder or athlete who has a lot of muscle. However, many people who are overweight are also obese.
- Nearly two-thirds of U.S. adults are overweight (body mass index (or BMI) > 25, which includes those who are obese), while nearly one-third of U.S. adults are obese (BMI > 30).

*Source: Weight Control Information Network*

- The increase in the prevalence of overweight and obesity among older adults has been dramatic. In 1999-2002, 69% of Americans age 65 and over were overweight, and 30% were obese. In the last 2 decades, the increases among those aged 65-74 have been especially striking. Between 1976-1980 and 1999-2002, the percentage of people age 65-74 who were overweight rose from 57% to 73%; the percentage who were obese rose from 18% to 36%.  
*Source: Older Americans 2004: Key Indicators of Well-Being*
- Among the obese population age 51 and older, a disproportionate share – three-quarters – are age 51 to 69, yet this age group comprises only two-thirds of the general population age 51 and older.  
*Source: Center on an Aging Society: Obesity among Older Americans (2003)*
- An obese Medicare participant costs \$1,486 more in healthcare expenditures per year than does a participant of healthy weight.
- Weight gain frequently occurs during middle age, in part related to a more sedentary lifestyle. Regrettably, many older adults associate weight gain and a sedentary lifestyle with the aging

process and make little effort toward prevention.

*Source: Weight Issues in Later Years (Generations, Fall 2004)*

- The age-adjusted prevalence of combined overweight and obesity in racial/ethnic minorities – especially minority women – is generally higher than in whites in the United States.
  - Non-Hispanic Black women: 77.3%
  - Mexican American women: 71.9%
  - Non-Hispanic White women: 57.3%

*Source: Weight Control Information Network*

### A Look at Our Diet \_\_\_\_\_

- One of the reasons for the rise in obesity is an overall higher caloric intake. The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey revealed that in 1988-1991 adults consumed 100-300 calories more per day than their counterparts in 1976-1980.
- Body fat peaks later in women than in men (around age 50-60) and older women are more likely to live alone than are older men. Homebound status and living alone have been associated with higher BMI, inadequate intakes of desirable nutrients, and unhealthy dietary patterns.  
*Source: Weight Issues in Later Years (Generations, Fall 2004)*
- Since calorie recommendations and intakes generally decrease with age, it is important for older adults to choose foods wisely to meet their nutritional needs. On average, most older adults consume an adequate amount of protein, too much fat, and too little fiber.  
*Source: Translating the Science of Nutrition into the Art of Healthy Eating (Generations, Fall 2004)*
- Nearly 18% of individuals who are older than 85 are considered to have a poor diet, compared to 16% of all Americans.

*Source: Center for Advancement of Health (2004)*

*The Importance of Staying Active* —————

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only 37% of Americans who are older than 65 get the daily recommended level of exercise. Another 35% of individuals in this age group do not get enough exercise, and 28% get no exercise.

Source: Center for Advancement of Health (2004)

- It is important for older people to be physically active every day to increase their energy, or calorie, needs so they can eat more healthy foods without weight gain.

Source: *Translating the Science of Nutrition into the Art of Healthy Eating (Generations, Fall 2004)*

- Increased physical fitness and weight loss reduce midhigh low-density lean tissue and improve glucose and lipid metabolic risk factors for cardio-vascular disease in obese postmenopausal women.

Source: *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. Ryan, et al. (2000)*

*Obesity and Overall Health* —————

- In terms of chronic conditions, the effects of obesity are similar to the effects of 20 years of aging.

Source: *Center on an Aging Society: Obesity among Older Americans (2003)*

- Highly obese women are 12 times more likely to have diabetes or knee replacement surgery, and five times more likely to have high blood pressure than women who are at a normal weight.

Source: *Seniorjournal.com (2004)*

- In a British study of 4,232 men age 60 to 79, obese men had a doubled risk of major cardiovascular disease and were three times more likely to have diabetes as were older men at a normal weight.

Source: *Center for Advancement of Health (2004)*

- A study of over 73,000 older adults has found obesity is linked to a large number of poor health problems. Carrying extra weight was tied to 37 of the 41 health conditions studied in women and 29 of 41 conditions in men.

Source: *Seniorjournal.com (2004)*

- Men in the highest weight categories are eight times more likely to have diabetes, and six times more likely to have a knee replaced or have high blood pressure than are their normal-weight peers.

Source: *Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center*

***“The obesity epidemic is the result of several factors combining to form an infrastructure of obesity. This includes an oversupply of food production in general, an increased supply combined with near pornographic marketing tactics of processed food in sparticular, a growing fast food industry and our increasingly heavy reliance on exercise hostile urban sprawl.”***

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