

Body weight throughout life affects risk of disability

Obesity has been associated with multiple health conditions. A team of researchers was curious to find out the impact of body weight across the life span. They used data from 2,803 people in the Health, Aging and Body Composition study to compare body weight to physical performance, since poor physical performance is a predictor of future disability, nursing home admission and mortality.

Participants were 70- to 79-year-old Medicare-eligible people who reported no difficulty walking one-fourth of a mile, climbing 10 steps, or performing basic activities of daily living. Body mass index was calculated using recalled height and weight at ages 25 and 50, and measured height and weight at ages 70 to 79. Physical performance was assessed with the [Short Physical Performance Battery](#) and a 400-meter walk test.

At age 25, approximately 24% of men and 8% of women reported being overweight or obese. At age 50, 51% of men and 37% of women, and at ages 70 to 79 years 69% of men and 66% of women were overweight or obese. For all age groups, men and women who were obese had significantly lower scores of physical performance than those who were normal weight at these ages. Women who were overweight, but not obese, at these ages also had lower performance.

"Obesity may lead to joint wear and tear, reduced exercise capacity, and a higher rate of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and arthritis that can result in physical disability," said Denise K. Houston, PhD, RD, lead author. "Obesity in young and middle adulthood may result in earlier onset of chronic diseases and lower physical activity, contributing to decreased muscle strength and cardiovascular fitness and greater declines in physical performance."

[SOURCE: International Journal of Obesity, online \(May 22, 2007\)](#)