

Redefining obesity's health risks: Scientists make the case for new body fat assessment

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The body mass index (BMI) has long been the yardstick in deciding who is at risk because of their weight. BMI is essentially a measure of density, identifying 'under-' and 'over-weight' risk groups. Recent studies however point towards a more sophisticated approach to the issue.

In a recent article for F1000 Biology Reports, Manfred J Müller and colleagues at the University of Kiel in Germany explain how 'functional' body composition analysis (BCA) measures more of the variables that determine whether or not obesity is 'benign'.

Recent studies using similar analysis suggest that up to 30% of obese people do not in fact require medical treatment. Widespread adoption of BCA could significantly improve the targeting of limited healthcare resources in the context of one of modern society's global killers.

Thanks to advances in imaging technology, variables - such as the body's fat proportion, location and distribution and the size of [fat cells](#) and fat droplets within these cells - can now be factored into the health risk assessment.

Coupled with a better understanding of the interrelation between genes, environment, hormone levels and metabolism, BCA gives clinicians a clearer picture of the specific health risks to an individual.

In light of the growing evidence in favour of functional BCA, the authors conclude that "the definitions of both 'overweight' and

'malnutrition' should be reconsidered" by clinicians and researchers. Evidently, size does still matter but it's what you do with it that really counts.

More information: Subscribers can view the full text of the evaluation at f1000biology.com/reports/10.3410/B1-75/

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