

# Overweight middle-aged adults at greater risk for cognitive decline in later life

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The adverse affects of being overweight are not limited to physical function but also extend to neurological function, according to research in the latest issue of the *Journals of Gerontology Series A: Biological and Medical Sciences* (Volume 65A, Number 1).

The publication presents a collection of ten articles highlighting new findings related to obesity in older persons.

"One of the unanticipated consequences of improved medical management of cardiovascular disease is that many [obese individuals](#) reach old age," said *Journal of Gerontology: Medical Sciences* Editor Luigi Ferrucci, MD, PhD, of the National Institute on Aging. "We need a better understanding of the causes and consequences of obesity in older individuals — especially when obesity is associated with sarcopenia."

A study headed by Anna Dahl, MS, of Sweden's Jönköping University, found that individuals with higher midlife [body mass index](#) (BMI) scores had significantly lower general cognitive ability and significantly steeper decline than their thinner counterparts over time. These statistics were compiled from a study of Swedish twins that took place over the course of nearly 40 years, from 1963 to 2002; the results were the same for both men and women.

Other studies reported in the journal show that obesity appears particularly threatening in the presence of other health problems, such as poor [muscle strength](#) and depression.

Similarly, changes in weight also signify declines in overall health. A team of researchers led by Alice M. Arnold, PhD, of the University of Washington, Seattle, found that such fluctuations are significant indicators of future physical limitations and mortality in the elderly. Arnold and her colleagues used data from the Cardiovascular Health Study, which included information from over 3,000 individuals aged 65 and older from 1992 to 1999. They discovered that a history of cyclically losing and gaining weight increased a person's chance of having difficulty with activities of daily living — bathing, dressing, eating, etc. -- by 28 percent.

**More information:** [Journals of Gerontology Series A: Biological and Medical Sciences](#)

Provided by The Gerontological Society of America

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