

# Obesity in Teen Girls May Lead To Depressive Symptoms

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Researchers, led by Kerri Boutelle, PhD, associate professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine have found that obesity is a risk factor for depressive symptoms, but not for clinical depression, suggesting that weight status could play a part in the development of depression in some adolescent girls.

“This is important, because depressive symptoms are considered a precursor to major depression,” said Boutelle.

According to the Centers for Disease and Prevention, [childhood obesity](#) has more than tripled in the past 30 years. The prevalence of obesity among adolescents aged 12 to 19 years increased from 5.0 percent to 18.1 percent in 2008. Similarly, the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, found that 2.0 million youths aged 12 to 17 experienced at least one major depressive episode in 2007.

Knowing that the teenage years are often a tumultuous period in a young person’s life, Boutelle and her colleagues set out to determine whether obesity contributes to the development of depression among youth. This is in contrast to the well-documented conclusion that depression increases the risk of [obesity](#). Results of their study will appear in the May 21st issue of *Health Psychology*.

Using a structured psychiatric interview test - the Schedule for Affective

Disorders and Schizophrenia for School-Age Children (K-SADS) - assessors gathered responses from almost 500 [girls](#) between the ages of 13 and 16 years, of various ethnicities. To receive a diagnosis of depression, the girls had to report the presence and severity of at least five symptoms. At each of four yearly assessments, the girls were weighed and measured. Data from the interviews indicated that obese status was associated with an increase in depressive symptoms, but not Major [Depression](#).

“Based on our findings, I would encourage parents, teachers and physicians to monitor overweight and obese girls for depressive symptoms, and refer them for evaluation if they are concerned,” said Boutelle.

Provided by University of California - San Diego

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