

Overweight more harmful to the liver than alcohol in middle-aged men

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Overweight carries a greatly increased risk of cirrhosis of the liver in men, reveals a new study from the Sahlgrenska Academy. "Given the increasing problem of overweight in Sweden, there is reason to fear that more people will develop cirrhosis of the liver," says Jerzy Kaczynski, docent at the Sahlgrenska Academy and doctor at Sahlgrenska University Hospital.

A group of researchers at the Sahlgrenska Academy has studied the link between overweight and the risk of developing cirrhosis of the [liver](#) in middle-aged men. Published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Gastroenterology*, the study took 855 men aged 50 and followed them for up to 40 years.

None of the men had [liver problems](#) at the beginning of the study but during the long follow-up period almost 2% were diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver. All of the men with this [diagnosis](#) were overweight at the beginning of the study, with an average BMI of 28 (a BMI of above 25 is classified as overweight). The average BMI for the men who were not diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver during the study was below 25. [Statistical analysis](#) has demonstrated that both [BMI](#) and raised levels of [triglycerides](#) – a type of blood fat – constituted risk factors for the development of cirrhosis of the liver. However, the same link could not be statistically proven for alcohol. One explanation for this could be that some men with alcohol problems may have declined to take part in the study.

The results of the study show that both overweight and raised levels of blood fats, which are common in overweight people, significantly increase the risk of men developing cirrhosis of the liver. Given the increasingly discussed and growing problem of overweight in Sweden, there are good grounds for concern that more people will be diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver.

"A liver that has been ill and weakened as a result of overweight can take less of a load," says Kaczynski. "We can therefore speculate that cirrhosis of the liver will develop more quickly in people who drink too much alcohol if they are overweight. Our study does not offer any evidence for this, but this kind of speculation is well founded."

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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