

By 2020 majority of adults in America will be overweight, suffer from diabetic conditions

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In 2020, the vast majority of adults in America will be overweight or obese and more than half will suffer from diabetes or pre-diabetic conditions, according to projections presented by Northwestern Medicine researchers at the American Heart Association (AHA) Scientific Sessions Wednesday, Nov. 16, in Orlando.

The AHA has set a target to help Americans improve their overall [heart health](#) by 20 percent in 2020. However, if current trends continue, Americans can expect only a modest improvement of six percent in overall [cardiovascular health](#) in 2020.

The implications of not increasing heart [health](#) by 20 percent by 2020 could be grave. Declining rates of sickness and death from cardiovascular disease may stall, and related health care costs, already projected to reach \$1.1 trillion per year by 2030, could rise even further. That's according to study author Mark Huffman, M.D., assistant professor in preventive medicine and medicine-cardiology at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and a cardiologist at Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

Representative of all Americans, the study is based on patterns found in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (NHANES) from 1988 to 2008. The projected numbers on weight and diabetes, based on previous trends, follow.

- In 2020, 83 percent of men and 72 percent of women will be overweight or obese.

Currently, 72 percent of men and 63 percent of women are overweight or obese (people who are overweight have a [Body Mass Index](#) (BMI) of 25 to 29kg/m², people who are obese have a BMI of 30kg/m² or greater).

- In 2020, 77 percent of men and 53 percent of women will have dysglycemia (either diabetes or pre-diabetes). Currently, 62 percent of men and 43 percent of women have dysglycemia.

"To increase overall heart health by 20 percent, American adults would need to rapidly reverse these unhealthy trends -- starting today," Huffman said. "In concert with individual choices, public health policies can be and should be effective tools to reduce smoking, increase access to healthy foods, and increase [physical activity](#) in daily life."

More people would need to improve health behaviors related to diet, physical activity, body weight and smoking and health factors, related to glucose, cholesterol and blood pressure.

"We've been dealing with the obesity trend for the past three decades, but the impact we project on blood sugar is a true shock," said Donald Lloyd-Jones, M.D., chair and associate professor of [preventive medicine](#) at the Feinberg School of Medicine, a physician at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and senior author of the study. "Those are some really scary numbers. When blood sugar goes up like that all of the complications of diabetes come into play."

Less than five percent of Americans currently are considered to have ideal cardiovascular health. The modest six percent improvement in cardiovascular health that is projected for 2020 means better cholesterol

and blood pressure numbers for Americans and fewer smokers. Improvements in treatment and control of cholesterol and blood pressure with medication and declines in smoking would partially account for this small boost, but they wouldn't be enough to offset the weight and diabetes problems Americans face, Huffman said. Projected improvements in diet and physical activity also contribute to the six percent projection, but the absolute increase in Americans who consume ideal diets will remain less than two percent by 2020, if current trends continue.

"Since the 1960s cardiovascular disease death rates have substantially decreased, but if the weight and dysglycemia trends continue to increase, we are in danger of seeing a reversal of those gains," Huffman said.

Achieving a healthy weight through diet and physical activity is the best way most Americans can improve their cardiovascular health, but, as Huffman stressed, not smoking is the number one preventable cause of preventable death. Yet, one in five Americans still smoke.

Provided by Northwestern University

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