

Cancer threat fails to stop overweight brits losing the flab

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Nearly two-thirds of overweight Britons say they are struggling to find the drive to lose weight despite the vast majority knowing it increases their risk of cancer – according to a new Cancer Research UK report published today.

This is the first time a survey has shown that even when heavier people know excess body weight is linked to [cancer](#), they still feel that ‘lack of willpower’ is a barrier.

Recent research from Cancer Research UK showed that rates of a number of cancers linked to weight – including kidney and womb cancers - are increasing rapidly. Obesity may be behind these rises.

After smoking, being overweight or obese is one of the most important avoidable cancer risks. Scientists estimate that, in the UK, the number of people who are overweight and obese could lead to around 19,000 cases of cancer a year.

Dr Harpal Kumar, Cancer Research UK’s chief executive, said: “Unless we tackle the obesity epidemic in the UK we risk cancer cases soaring. We understand that it can be extremely hard for people to maintain a healthy weight but keeping those extra pounds at bay could ultimately save your life.”

The survey results also showed that more women who are overweight believed that lack of willpower was the biggest barrier with over 68 per

cent saying that it stopped them losing weight, compared to 60 per cent of overweight men.

Of those surveyed – 87 per cent of the overweight Brits claimed they wanted to lose weight. After lack of willpower, they reported that ‘having too many other things to worry about’, and ‘trying it before and not being successful’ as other barriers to losing weight.

Professor Jane Wardle, from Cancer Research UK’s Health Behaviour Research Centre based at University College London, said: "Our report shows that even though overweight people would like to lose weight and are aware of the cancer risk – they feel lack of willpower is a major barrier to shedding the pounds. We know that the modern day environment makes it very hard for people to lose weight especially when they are bombarded by advertising and easily tempted by cheap readymade meals and fast food instead of a balanced diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables.

“But for both men and women being overweight is, after smoking, the most important risk factor for cancer. What many people don’t realise is that extra fat around the middle – their ‘muffin top’ – is surprisingly active, releasing hormones and other chemicals that can make cells in the body divide far more often than usual, which can increase the risk of cancer.”

Dr Susan Jebb, head of diet and population health at the Medical Research Council, said: “It’s encouraging that most people recognise a poor diet and lack of physical activity significantly increase their risk of developing cancer. But it’s also clear that most people find it hard to turn their good intentions - to eat better and move more - into sustained changes in their lifestyle. This gap between knowledge and behaviour helps to explain why the number of people who are obese is continuing to increase.

“Research shows that to make sustained changes in diet and physical activity people need tangible support from family, friends or health professionals. In the longer term, it’s important that the places we live and work make the healthier choice the easier choice, so healthy living becomes a way of life, not a matter of personal willpower.”

Research by Cancer Research UK recently showed that more than four in 10 cancers could be prevented by many different lifestyle changes.

Those surveyed also reported wanting to change other lifestyle behaviours. Nearly 70 per cent wanted to [lose weight](#) and similar numbers wanted to increase the amount of exercise they did; around 60 per cent wanted to increase the amount of fruit and vegetables they ate.

But in comparison only 18 per cent wanted to reduce their alcohol intake and fewer than 20 per cent wanted to cut down on the amount of red and processed meat they ate.

Dr Harpal Kumar, Cancer Research UK’s chief executive, added:
“Leading a healthy life doesn’t guarantee that a person won’t get cancer but we do know that healthy habits can significantly stack the odds in our favour.

“We have made tremendous progress in improving the chance of surviving cancer during the last 40 years, but we need to do more. Helping people to understand the risks of getting the disease in the first place means they can make the healthiest possible lifestyle choices.”

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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