

Yo-yo dieting can hurt the heart, study finds

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Older women who lose weight and then regain it may raise their risk of cardiovascular trouble.

(HealthDay)—Older women who lose weight and gain it back again may be increasing their risk for heart disease, Wake Forest University researchers report.

Although cholesterol, blood pressure, [triglycerides](#) and blood sugar all improve with [weight loss](#), with weight regain they all return to pre-diet levels and, in some cases, to even higher levels, the researchers found.

"For [postmenopausal women](#) considering weight loss, maintaining weight loss is just as important as losing weight," said lead researcher Daniel Beavers, an assistant professor in the department of biostatistics and public health sciences at Wake Forest University School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, N.C. "Even partial weight regain is

associated with worsened diabetes and [cardiovascular risk factors](#)."

In an earlier study of these same [women](#), the researchers found that those who regained weight during the year following weight loss regained fat mass to a greater degree than lean mass, Beavers said.

The report was published in the Dec. 13 online edition of the *Journal of Gerontology: Medical Sciences*.

For the study, the researchers studied more than 100 postmenopausal [obese women](#) while they took part in a five-month weight-loss program. They continued to monitor the women for a year. During the weight-loss program the women lost an average of 25 pounds.

After a year, two-thirds of the women had regained at least four pounds, on average regaining about 70 percent of the weight they had lost, the researchers found.

"Women who regained 4.4 pounds or more in the year following the weight-loss intervention had several worsened cardiovascular and diabetes risk factors," Beavers said.

"What was striking about the women who regained weight was that although they did not return to their full baseline weight on average—women only regained about 70 percent of lost weight—several chronic disease risk factors were right back at baseline values and in some cases, particularly for the diabetic [risk factors](#), slightly worse than baseline values," he added. "Meanwhile, women who maintained their weight loss a year later managed to preserve most of the benefits."

Dr. Gregg Fonarow, professor of cardiology at the University of California, Los Angeles, said that "this study highlights the importance of not just losing weight, but the need to develop effective and enduring

strategies so that this weight loss can be successfully maintained long term."

Another expert advises taking a lifestyle approach to dieting.

"This small study is a great example of why we need to avoid fad diets and diet programs, potions and pills that promise quick weight loss," said Samantha Heller, an exercise physiologist and clinical nutrition coordinator at the Center for Cancer Care at Griffin Hospital in Derby, Conn.

Most people regain the weight within five years, she said. "This study indicates that regaining as little as five pounds can spell cardiometabolic trouble, especially for postmenopausal women," Heller said.

People should be focusing on being healthy, not skinny, she said, and they should create strategies for reaching and maintaining a healthy weight throughout their lifetime.

"The roller coaster of weight loss and regain is deleterious both physically and psychologically," Heller said.

"While it can be frustrating to take the slower, healthier route to weight loss, the long-term results are ultimately more satisfying and healthier," she said. "Start with simple changes such as swapping seltzer for soda, keeping a daily food record, adding a salad to lunch and substituting a second vegetable for half the starch at dinner."

More information: For more information on healthy diets, visit the [U.S. National Heart Lung and Blood Institute](#).

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