

People with a disability more likely to be obese, have chronic illnesses

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Adults with a disability are more likely to be obese or extremely obese than those without a disability according to a study led by researchers at The University of Texas School of Public Health, which is part of The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth).

There are approximately 54 million Americans living with a disability and according to the latest research, nearly 42 percent of American adults with a disability were reported as obese and 9 percent as extremely obese. Participants were identified as having a disability if they reported [mobility issues](#).

The findings are from a recent study published in the June edition of the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*. The study is believed to be the first to assess the [obesity](#) prevalence of people with a disability based on measured height and weight rather than relying on participants to provide this information.

"Prior to this research, national samples only indicated obesity prevalence in adults with disabilities at 29 to 31 percent," said Katherine Froehlich-Grobe, Ph.D., lead author of the paper and associate professor of health promotion and [behavioral science](#) at The UT School of Public Health Dallas Regional Campus. "We were surprised at the magnitude of how high obesity prevalence was among those with a disability."

According to the study, adults with a disability had a higher prevalence of several chronic illnesses including diabetes, hypertension and [high](#)

[cholesterol](#). People with disabilities were twice as likely to have prescribed medication for hypertension and lipid-lowering medicine.

Froehlich-Grobe says the obesity disparity between people with disabilities and people without a disability should be addressed. She suggests that primary care providers should amp up their efforts on counseling patients to change their lifestyle with diet and exercise instead of only prescribing medication to control the [chronic illnesses](#).

"Health care providers face a challenge when it comes to helping their patients with a disability manage their weight when exercise and physical activity play such an important role in weight management," said Froehlich-Grobe. "People with disabilities are underserved by national efforts aiming at reducing and preventing obesity. We must focus on managing and reducing weight for individuals with a disability."

Recent guidelines say those with [disabilities](#) should participate in moderate physical activity and be as active as they can within the limitations of their disability. For more information on how people with a disability can become more active, visit The National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability's website.

Provided by University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston

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