

Feeling depressed may weigh on women

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The Tulane Prevention Research Center study found that women who reported more depression symptoms were less likely to feel confident in their ability to exercise. Credit: Masterfile

A Tulane University study of women working in Greater New Orleans area public schools found that symptoms of depression were linked to behaviors that can lead to overweight and obesity.

"This study adds to growing evidence of the link between depressive symptoms and weight in women," says Carolyn Johnson, director of the Tulane Prevention Research Center and an author of the study.

The study used data collected from 743 women in 22 Jefferson Parish schools in fall 2006 from a project called ACTION, a wellness program designed to address eating and [physical activity](#) barriers among adult school personnel.

The survey asked about different components of exercise and eating behavior, such as uncontrolled eating, emotional eating and cognitive restraint (a stable ability to limit food intake). The researchers calculated the [body mass index](#) (BMI) of each woman. Adults are considered overweight if they have a BMI of 25 or greater and obese if they have a BMI of 30 or greater.

Women who reported greater [symptoms of depression](#) said they engaged in more emotional eating, which was linked to a higher BMI. Women who reported more depression symptoms also were less likely to feel confident in their ability to exercise.

The authors noted that the study's women had increased depressive symptoms compared to women in other national studies – perhaps because women were affected by Hurricane Katrina, which hit New Orleans just one year prior to the study.

"Given the high rates of both depression and obesity in [women](#), there is an urgent need for new strategies to address these co-occurring health issues," says Gretchen Clum, associate professor of global community health and behavioral sciences and lead author of the study.

To properly address obesity and overweight, the study's authors suggest policies and programs that take into account a person's depressive symptoms, [emotional eating](#), and their confidence in being able to eat healthy and engage in physical activity.

The ACTION paper on [depressive symptoms](#) was e-published in the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* in August 2013.

More information: "Associations between depressive symptoms, self-efficacy, eating styles, exercise and body mass index in women."
Gretchen A. Clum, Janet C. Rice, Marsha Broussard, Carolyn C.

Johnson, Larry S. Webber. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, August 2013. DOI: [10.1007/s10865-013-9526-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10865-013-9526-5)

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