

Excess weight early in life linked to colon cancer risk in women

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Study supports evidence that body size in childhood may influence cancer risk decades later.

(HealthDay)—Women who were overweight as children and teens may have a greater risk of colon cancer, no matter what their current weight, a new study cautions.

Researchers analyzed data from more than 75,000 American women and more than 34,000 American men. Over an average of 22 years, 2,100 of them developed colon cancer.

Compared to women who were lean in childhood, those who were overweight as [young children](#) had a 28 percent higher risk of developing colon cancer. Women who were overweight in their [teens](#) had a 27 percent higher risk of colon cancer than women who were lean during their teen years, the findings showed.

Although this study found a link between being overweight earlier in life and a higher risk of colon cancer in women, it wasn't designed to prove that being overweight in your youth causes colon cancer later.

Also, the link between being overweight when young and higher odds of [colon cancer](#) later wasn't seen in men, according to the study.

The findings were published in the April issue of the journal *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*.

"We really don't know why we only observed the association in [women](#) and not in men, but since this is still a relatively new area of research, it's too early to conclude that this association does not exist in men," study senior author Esther Wei, of the California Pacific Medical Center, said in a journal news release.

"Our study supports the growing evidence that early life body size can influence risk of [colorectal cancer](#) many decades later," Wei said.

"Although we don't need any additional evidence to encourage obesity prevention and increased physical activity in children, this study adds additional imperative to prioritizing children's health," she continued.

About one-third of American children and teens are overweight or obese, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Alice Bender is the associate director for nutrition programs at the American Institute for Cancer Research. She said in the news release: "We already know that overweight kids often become overweight adults. And [overweight](#) adults are at risk for many cancers. This study emphasizes how important it is for parents and caregivers to help kids choose healthy habits, so it becomes natural for them."

Bender also advised parents to let kids see you enjoying fruits and vegetables, and to give them healthy options. Additionally, she suggested taking fun five-minute activity breaks. These "are just a few of the ways you can set your kids on a path to be healthy throughout life," she said.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [keeping children at a healthy weight](#).

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