

# Obesity and overweight multiply the risk of cancer and heart disease

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Being overweight or obese exponentially increases the risk of suffering heart disease or cancer. This is the conclusion of the Spanish Risk Function of Coronary and Other Events (FRESCO) study led by researchers from the Hospital del Mar Medical Research Institute (IMIM) and doctors from Hospital del Mar, who analysed the follow-up of 54,446 people from seven autonomic communities over a 10-year period.

The results clearly show the [obesity epidemic](#) has a greater impact on women. In fact, women are five times more likely to suffer a cardiovascular disease, and have 12 times greater risk of developing cancer than those of [normal weight](#). Being overweight, even below [obesity](#) levels, still involves twice the risk of [heart disease](#) and four times the risk of cancer.

Weight influences male health to a much lesser degree. Obesity doubles men's likelihood of developing some type of cancer, but it does not have a significant influence on cardiovascular diseases. Dr. Maria Grau, one of the authors of the study and a researcher in the IMIM's Epidemiology and Cardiovascular Genetics group, says it has become clear that "any increment in [body mass](#) above recommended levels supposes a proportional increase in the risk of adverse health events."

Only 26 percent of the population has a normal weight.

Of the 54,000 people who participated in the study, which included men

and women aged 35 to 79, more than 25,000 were overweight and 15,000 were obese. That means only 26 percent had what is considered to be a normal weight (below a body mass index (BMI) of 25). The study screened out the possible effects of other pathologies linked to weight, such as high blood pressure, diabetes and hypercholesterolaemia.

The researchers think the results of the work are concerning. Dr. Jaume Marrugat, principal investigator of the study and director of the IMIM's Epidemiology and Public Health group, says, "It is necessary to find strategies for promoting a healthy diet, doing physical activity, screening for diseases, and establishing prevention policies that affect the entire population in order to decrease the prevalence of obesity. The improvements in [cardiovascular risk factors](#) achieved over the last 20 years are dramatically neutralised by the obesity epidemic."

Dr. Albert Goday, an endocrinologist at Hospital del Mar and one of the authors of the study, says, "Nobody is obese because they want to be. Obesity is a potentially serious medical condition that determines an increased risk of death from various causes. This situation goes beyond looks, and means we should adopt preventive measures and treatment that are not always easy to follow."

Despite this, he says, "If the patient is able to decrease their level of obesity, the risk of death decreases." Treatment is based on lifestyle, modifying dietary habits and increasing physical activity. Small weight reductions result in huge health benefits. In a country where the average life expectancy is 80, overweight people who lose 5 kilos in their 40s and do not put it back on reduce their risk of [cardiovascular disease](#) by 20 percent. For women, this also involves a 20 percent reduction in the risk of cancer.

The World Health Organisation estimates that obesity affects more than 650 million people across the globe. Their number has tripled since

1975, and in 2016, there were 41 million children under age five who were overweight or obese. In addition, it is linked to pathologies such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders and cancer. Childhood obesity is associated with a greater probability of premature death and disability in adulthood.

**More information:** Barroso M, Goday A, Ramos R, Marín-Ibañez A, Guembe MJ, Rigo F, Tormo-Díaz MJ, Moreno-Iribas C, Cabré JJ, Segura A, Baena-Díez JM, Gómez de la Cámara A, Lapetra J, Quesada M, Medrano MJ, Berjón J, Frontera G, Gavrilá D, Barricarte A, Basora J, García JM, García-Lareo M, Lora-Pablos D, Mayoral E, Grau M\*, Marrugat J\*, FRESCO Investigators. Interaction between cardiovascular risk factors and body mass index and 10-year incidence of cardiovascular disease, cancer death, and overall mortality. *Prev Med* 2017

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