

Weight loss reverses heart condition in obesity sufferers

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Credit: University of Adelaide

Australian research shows for the first time that obese people who are suffering from atrial fibrillation can reduce or reverse the effects of the condition by losing weight.

Published in the heart journal *Europace*, the researchers found that a 10% loss in [weight](#) along with management of associated risk factors, can reverse the progression of the disease. They studied 355 overweight or [obese people](#) who lost varying amounts of weight.

The research was led by the Centre for Heart Rhythm Disorders at the University of Adelaide and the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI).

"This is the first time that evidence has been found that if people who are obese and are suffering from [atrial fibrillation](#) the disease can be alleviated by losing weight and treating lifestyle factors," says lead author Melissa Middeldorp, Ph.D. researcher from the University of Adelaide's Centre for Heart Rhythm Disorders.

Atrial fibrillation (AF), Australia's most common [heart rhythm disorder](#), is a leading cause of stroke and can lead to heart failure. Millions of people around the world are diagnosed with this condition every year. Chest pain, a 'racing' or unusual [heart](#) beat and shortness of breath are all symptoms of AF.

"AF is a progressive disease in which initial short, intermittent symptoms develop into more sustained forms of the condition. Obesity and lifestyle factors are associated with its progression," says Ms Middeldorp.

The number of overweight and obese adults has doubled over the past two decades, with Australia now being ranked as one of the fattest developed nations.

"The study showed that if obese people lose more than 10% of their weight and subsequent management of other risks to their lifestyle, they can reverse the progression of the disease. People who lost weight experienced fewer symptoms, required less treatment and had better

outcomes. Those who previously had sustained symptoms experienced only intermittent symptoms or indeed stopped experiencing AF entirely," says Ms Middeldorp.

"Progression of the disease is shown to have a direct link with the degree of weight loss. Without weight loss, there is a progression of AF to more persistent forms of AF."

The Centre for Heart Rhythm Disorders is led by Professor Prash Sanders, world leader in atrial fibrillation research.

"This study shows that weight-loss and treating [lifestyle factors](#) is an essential component for

effectively managing AF, in many instances being an alternative to surgery or drug intervention. Melissa's work has widespread implications for the management of this [disease](#) globally and is good news for people with the condition," says Professor Sanders.

"With record levels of obesity in Australia and in most high-income countries, this study gives hope that obese people can have a better quality of life as well as reducing their dependence on health-care services if they lose weight."

More information: Melissa E Middeldorp et al. PREVENTion and regReSSive Effect of weight-loss and risk factor modification on Atrial Fibrillation: the REVERSE-AF study, *EP Europace* (2018). [DOI: 10.1093/europace/euy117](https://doi.org/10.1093/europace/euy117)

Provided by University of Adelaide

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