

Does having muscle weakness and obesity lead to falls for older women?

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As our society continues to age, experts project that falls and the health complications that can come with them will also rise. In fact, about two-thirds of all hospital costs (\$34 billion) are connected directly or indirectly with falls among older adults.

Falls can be especially challenging for [older people](#) who are obese and who also have sarcopenia (the medical term for a loss of [muscle strength](#) as we age). Currently, 5 percent to 13 percent of adults older than 60 have sarcopenia. Those rates may be as high as 50 percent in people 80-years-old and older.

Older adults who gain weight may increase their risk for muscle weakness and [falls](#). Obesity is a growing epidemic: More than one-third of adults 65-years-old and older were considered obese in 2010. Having sarcopenia and obesity, or "sarcopenic obesity," is linked to a decline in your ability to function physically, and to an increased risk of fractures.

A team of researchers writing for the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* suggested that it is important to identify people at risk for falls related to obesity and muscle weakness so that healthcare providers can offer appropriate solutions.

To learn more about sarcopenic obesity and its effects on falls in older women, the team reviewed information from the Women's Health Initiative (WHI). The full study includes health information—like weight, muscle mass, and experiences with falls—from more than

160,000 women aged 50 to 79 who were followed for more than 15 years. The researchers looked at results for 11,020 postmenopausal women.

The researchers concluded that out of the study participants, postmenopausal Hispanic/Latina women had the highest risk of falls related to sarcopenic obesity. They also noted that [postmenopausal women](#) younger than 65 were at a higher risk for falls connected to sarcopenic obesity.

The researchers said that, as we age, many [older adults](#) will be at high risk for falls as obesity and [muscle weakness](#) also increase. Efforts to learn more about how women's bodies change after menopause will help healthcare professionals design potential solutions.

More information: Shawna Follis et al, Association Between Sarcopenic Obesity and Falls in a Multiethnic Cohort of Postmenopausal Women, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2018). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.15613](#)

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