

Obesity exacerbates many causes of death, but risks are different for men and women

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People who carry around unhealthy amounts of weight don't just have heart disease and diabetes to worry about. Obesity is implicated in two thirds of the leading causes of death from non-communicable diseases

worldwide and the risk of certain diseases differs for men and women. Cecilia Lindgren of the University of Oxford and colleagues report these findings in a new study published 24th October in *PLOS Genetics*.

As rates of obesity continue to grow worldwide, scientists have begun to suspect that excess weight might lead to or exacerbate other causes of death besides [heart disease](#) and type 2 diabetes. To identify additional causes of death made worse by obesity, researchers performed an analysis that explores cause-and-effect relationships using genetic data and three measures of obesity from 228,466 women and 195,041 men in the UK Biobank. Their analysis showed that obesity contributes to a laundry list of health problems including [coronary artery disease](#), type 1 and 2 diabetes, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, [non-alcoholic fatty liver disease](#), chronic liver disease and kidney failure. While obesity causes type 2 diabetes in both women and men, women experienced a higher risk of type 2 diabetes as compared to men, while men faced a greater risk of [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease](#) and chronic kidney disease.

First author, Jenny Censin, said "this study shows just how harmful carrying excess weight can be to [human health](#), and that women and men may experience different diseases as a result." Michael Holmes, who supervised the work together with Cecilia Lindgren, said "given the compelling evidence of harm that arises as a consequence of obesity across a broad range of diseases that result in death, our findings highlight the critical need for public health measures to stem the tide of obesity."

Overall, the study finds that obesity causes or contributes to the majority of the leading causes of death worldwide that are not linked to infectious diseases. The impacts of obesity, however, manifest differently in men and women. The findings have potential implications for the design of public health strategies and suggest that different preventative measures

targeted at men and women may be warranted.

More information: Jenny C. Censin et al, Causal relationships between obesity and the leading causes of death in women and men, *PLOS Genetics* (2019). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pgen.1008405](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgen.1008405)

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