

Adults over 50 with obesity experience greater stress during the first year of COVID

February 14 2023



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Adults over 50 living with obesity were more likely to experience stressors during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic despite being less likely to perceive the pandemic's consequences as negative, says a

McMaster University-led study.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has indirectly impacted a wide range of conditions affecting the health of Canadians and it is critical that we understand the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on people with [chronic diseases](#), such as obesity, and intervene now," said Laura Anderson, the senior study author and an associate professor in the Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact.

The research was [published](#) online in the *International Journal of Obesity*.

The study is one of the first to use a national, population-based cohort to explore potential factors that may impact [older adults' stress](#) during the pandemic.

The link between stress and obesity is well known, but there has been limited research on how this relationship was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Obesity, which is commonly measured using Body Mass Index, was recognized as a risk factor for severe illness and death from COVID-19 in the first year of the pandemic. Researchers hypothesized that the risk factors associated with obesity may have contributed to increased weight bias and stress for people living with the condition.

"A potential pathway between obesity and these stressors could be related to weight bias and stigma; there was extensive media coverage highlighting obesity as a potential risk factor for COVID-19 mortality which may have increased weight stigma," the researchers wrote.

The study examined data from nearly 24,000 participants enrolled in the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA), who were between the

ages of 50 and 96 during the first year of the pandemic. The participants completed the CLSA COVID-19 Questionnaire Study, which collected longitudinal data from April to December 2020. The researchers also used data collected before the pandemic to examine if [childhood adversity](#), such as abuse and neglect, was a factor that modified the relationship between obesity and stress.

The research team found that people with obesity were more likely to experience an increase in overall stressors, as well as health-related stressors, but did not perceive the consequences of the pandemic as negative or very negative. They also found that females with class III obesity, sometimes referred to as severe obesity, were less likely to report stress outcomes during the pandemic than males.

Similarly, people who experienced [adverse childhood experiences](#) were substantially more likely to experience stressors and had more negative perceptions of the pandemic. However, there was no evidence that the association between obesity and stress was modified by childhood adversity.

"More research is needed to be better understand why people with obesity were more likely to report [stressors](#) but did not perceive the consequences of the pandemic as negative," Anderson said.

"It will also be important to determine how stress experienced during the [pandemic](#) impacts obesity rates, and potential mechanisms for this association."

The research team concluded that targeted interventions, including mental health support and weight bias prevention, can help to eliminate the cyclical association between stress and [obesity](#), and mitigate the burden of disease linked to the

More information: Vanessa De Rubeis et al, Obesity and adverse childhood experiences in relation to stress during the COVID-19 pandemic: an analysis of the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging, *International Journal of Obesity* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s41366-023-01258-9](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41366-023-01258-9)

Provided by McMaster University

Citation: Adults over 50 with obesity experience greater stress during the first year of COVID (2023, February 14) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-02-adults-obesity-greater-stress-year.html>

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