

Uncle sam wants you ... slimmer

June 30 2016



(HealthDay)—Military personnel are expected to meet strict weight and body fat standards. But one in five U.S. military service members is obese, new research shows.

"We count on our [military](#) to be in the best shape both physically and mentally, and these data show there is a need to improve efforts to maintain a [healthy weight](#) within our Armed Forces," said Catherine Champagne, a member of The Obesity Society's advocacy committee.

Analyzing data compiled on 42,200 current and former military personnel from 2001 to 2008, the researchers found [obesity](#) affected 32 percent of veterans and 20 percent of active service members. The percentage of obese veterans wasn't significantly different between one and three years after discharge, suggesting the increase in obesity occurs soon after active duty ends, the study noted.

The study also found that veterans are just as likely as civilians to be obese. And obesity among active-duty personnel as well as veterans is associated with depression, [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) (PTSD) and other [mental health issues](#), the researchers noted.

High blood pressure, diabetes and sleep apnea were also much more common among the obese participants, according to the study.

"Because military personnel—and especially veterans—make up a sizable portion of the U.S. population, this research is important to the overall health of the country," Champagne said in a Obesity Society news release.

A study co-author said a healthier military would reduce health-care costs.

"Establishing lifelong healthy behaviors for active duty and veteran military personnel could not only ensure a fit force, but also reduce post-service-related costs for the Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs and the U.S. health care system," said study leader Toni Rush. "More importantly, it could enhance the quality of life for

thousands of veterans."

Although greater muscle mass among service members may have affected some of the data, the researchers said their findings could be used to improve health programs and policies targeting U.S. service members and [veterans](#).

"The findings show that even when equipped with the knowledge of how to implement healthy behaviors, it can be difficult to maintain a healthy weight when motivational drivers change," Champagne said. "Given the associations of obesity and its complications, this should be seen as a national priority both for the American people and its military."

Obesity is a leading barrier to military service for people aged 17 to 24, she and her colleagues pointed out.

The findings were published in the July issue of the journal *Obesity*.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides more information on [obesity](#).

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Citation: Uncle sam wants you ... slimmer (2016, June 30) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-06-uncle-sam-slimmer.html>

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