

Obesity might raise your risk for A-fib

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(HealthDay)—Obese people are at increased risk for the heart rhythm disorder atrial fibrillation, which can cause complications such as heart failure and stroke.

That's the finding of a study that included more than 67,000 U.S. adults. Their average age was about 44, and half of them were obese.

During the eight-year follow-up, 2.7 percent of the obese participants developed atrial fibrillation (A-fib), compared with 1.8 percent of those who weren't obese. That translated into a 40 percent higher risk of developing the condition.

"If you have both atrial fibrillation and [obesity](#), treating obesity will go a long way in treating and managing your atrial fibrillation," said study author Dr. Andrew Foy. He's an assistant professor of medicine at Penn State College of Medicine.

"And if you have obesity, and lose weight through diet, exercise, or even surgery, that will help reduce your risk of developing chronic conditions like atrial fibrillation," he added in a Penn State

news release.

Atrial fibrillation is an irregular or fluttering heart beat that can prevent proper pumping of the blood. This can put you at risk for heart failure. Also, blood could pool inside your heart and form clots, which can cause a stroke.

The added strain on obese people's hearts may be the reason they're at increased risk for atrial fibrillation, Foy suggested.

"When the heart is strained, it can lead to changes in the atrium—the top chambers of the [heart](#)—and it's here where we believe structural abnormalities can precipitate atrial [fibrillation](#)," he explained.

"Patients with obesity tend to have more fibrosis, higher pressures and more fatty infiltration in the top chamber of their hearts, so [atrial fibrillation](#) could be related to these types of changes," he suggested.

Foy said the study highlights the need to treat obesity, even in seemingly healthy patients.

"We have lots of interventions aimed at treating hypertension [high blood pressure], but we don't really have the same when it comes to obesity," Foy said.

"We know that obesity is a problem, but we need to be as serious about the management, prevention and treatment of the obesity crisis as we are about conditions like hypertension and diabetes."

The study was published recently in the *American Journal of Cardiology*.

More information: The U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute has more on [atrial fibrillation](#).

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