

Study questions obesity conclusions

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A controversial study from the University of Toronto questions earlier research concluding that obesity in the United States can be predicted by zip code.

Economist Matthew Turner said rather than blaming urban sprawl for obesity perhaps overweight people are drawn to sprawling neighborhoods, The Los Angeles Times reported.

Turner and his colleagues examined data collected on nearly 6,000 men and women living in the United States, many of whom had moved at least once.

The team found that the subjects' weight did not increase significantly when they went from neighborhoods that had low sprawl to areas of high sprawl.

"It's widely observed that people are heavier in sprawling neighborhoods than in nonsprawling neighborhoods," Turner told the Times.

"There are two possible explanations," he said. "One is that sprawling neighborhoods cause people to be heavy. The other is that people who are predisposed to be heavy are attracted to sprawling neighborhoods."

Turner's study, released online, has been criticized by public health researchers and urban planners.

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