Study: Obesity Risk May Run Higher in Families Plagued by Alcoholism

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If you have an alcoholic parent or other familymember, you might tend to become obese, according to study findingspublished in the *Archives of General Psychiatry* and reported by HealthDay News.

Forthe study, researchers examined data from two huge U.S. alcoholismsurveys done 10 years apart. When scientists analyzed data from bothstudies, results showed that men and women with a family history ofalcoholism were more prone to being obese.

But findings alsoshowed that women with this family background were 49 percent morelikely than their male counterparts to become obese.

What'smore, researchers noted that the connection between a family history ofalcoholism and obesity had strengthened over time.

Why? Becausemore high-calorie foods with sugar, salt and fat are available than inthe past—and these are the foods that the brain's reward centers love,said Richard A. Grucza, PhD, an assistant professor of psychiatry atWashington University School of Medicine in St. Louis.

"Alcoholand drugs affect those same parts of the brain," Grucza said. "Ourthinking was that because the same brain structures are beingstimulated, overconsumption of those foods might be greater in peoplewith a predisposition to addiction."

In addiction research,whether the predisposition to one condition may also contribute toothers is called cross-heritability. The newest survey data not onlyshowed that alcoholism and obesity are cross-heritable, Grucza said,but also suggested that the environment changed in the 10-year periodbetween studies.

What this means is that the higher risk ofobesity for people in families with alcoholism problems wasn't purelygenetic. "Some of the risks must be a function of the environment,"Grucza explained.

But a family history of alcoholism is not the only thing that may contribute to an increased risk of obesity. Click here for more about other drivers of this huge U.S. problem.

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