

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

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If you have an alcoholic parent or other family member, you might tend to become obese, according to study findings published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry* and reported by [HealthDay News](#).

For the study, researchers examined data from two huge U.S. alcoholism surveys done 10 years apart. When scientists analyzed data from both studies, results showed that men and women with a family history of alcoholism were more prone to being obese.

But findings also showed that women with this family background were 49 percent more likely than their male counterparts to become obese.

What's more, researchers noted that the connection between a family history of alcoholism and obesity had strengthened over time.

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

"Alcohol and drugs affect those same parts of the brain," Grucza said. "Our thinking was that because the same brain structures are being stimulated, overconsumption of those foods might be greater in people with a predisposition to addiction."

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

What this means is that the higher risk of obesity for people in families with alcoholism problems wasn't purely genetic. "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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