

Higher BMI Linked to Greater Risk of Obesity-Related Cancers

The link between body mass index and cancer incidence persisted regardless of cardiometabolic disease status.

May 8, 2024 By [Sukanya Charuchandra](#)

Overweight and obesity increase the risk of certain cancers regardless of the presence of cardiovascular and metabolic disease, according to study results published in [BMC Medicine](#). However, these findings suggest that efforts to reduce obesity could be especially beneficial for people with cardiovascular disease.

Obesity has been [linked to at least 13 types of cancer](#), but whether cancer risk differs among adults with and without cardiovascular disease or type 2 diabetes is unclear.

Heinz Freisling, PhD, of the International Agency for Research on Cancer in France, and colleagues conducted a meta-analysis of two prospective cohort studies: the U.K. Biobank and the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and nutrition (EPIC). They sought to understand the link between [body mass index \(BMI\)](#) and the risk for obesity-related cancers among people with and without cardiometabolic disease.

The study population included 577,343 adults, none of whom had cancer, type 2 diabetes or cardiovascular disease at baseline. In the U.K. Biobank cohort, 32,549 participants (9.5%) developed a first primary cancer, including 12,526 cases of obesity-related malignancies. In the EPIC cohort, 19,833 participants (8.3%) developed a first primary cancer, 7,892 of which were obesity-related.

Higher BMI was linked to greater risk for obesity-related cancers among people without cardiometabolic disease (11% higher risk), people with type 2 diabetes (11% higher) and people with cardiovascular disease (17%). There was a trend toward a higher risk among those with both type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease (9% higher).

People with both overweight or obesity and heart disease had a 3.4 times higher risk for obesity-related cancers compared to those without either condition. People with normal weight and heart disease were worse off than those with overweight or obesity but without heart disease.

BMI was also associated with a higher cancer risk overall—not just obesity-related cancers—in

both cohorts. BMI was linked to overall cancer risk in people without cardiometabolic disease and in those with heart disease.

“Irrespective of cardiometabolic disease status, higher BMI increased the risk of obesity-related cancer among European adults,” wrote the researchers. “The additive interaction between obesity and cardiovascular disease suggests that obesity prevention would translate into a greater cancer risk reduction among population groups with cardiovascular disease than among the general population.”

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