

# Obesity Raises Risk for Diabetes in Older People

*Weight gain after age 50, just like earlier in life, raises risk.*

Obesity and excess body fat are risk factors for developing diabetes, but in mid- and late-life the association of various measures of adiposity with diabetes is less clear. A population-based prospective cohort study was used to follow about 4000 older people (age,  $\geq 65$  at enrollment) for a median of 12 years; 339 incident cases of diabetes were identified.

Risk for developing diabetes was roughly three- to fourfold higher for people in the highest quintile of adiposity than for those in the lowest. Risk associated with measures of body composition included body-mass index (BMI) at baseline (hazard ratio, 4.3 for the highest quintile), waist circumference (HR, 4.2), fat mass (HR, 4.0), waist-height ratio (HR, 3.8), BMI at age 50 (by self-recall; HR, 3.0), and waist-hip ratio (HR, 2.4). Risk conferred by adiposity in the oldest individuals (age,  $\geq 75$ ) was roughly half that in younger individuals (age range, 65–74). Compared with people who had gained no weight, those who had gained the most weight from age 50 to baseline or from baseline to the final follow-up assessment had two- to threefold higher risk for developing diabetes.

**Comment:** That almost any measure of obesity or adiposity is associated with risk for developing diabetes is not surprising, even in older patients. What is more interesting is that weight gain after age 50, compared with no weight gain, was associated with higher risk. Keep in mind, however, that overweight or mild obesity is not necessarily associated with higher mortality in older populations ([JW Gen Med Jan 19 2010](#)).

— [Thomas L. Schwenk, MD](#)

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