

Study suggests 86 percent of Americans could be overweight or obese by 2030

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Most adults in the U.S. will be overweight or obese by 2030, with related health care spending projected to be as much as \$956.9 billion, according to researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Their results are published in the July 2008 online issue of *Obesity*.

"National survey data show that the prevalence of overweight and obese adults in the U.S. has increased steadily over the past three decades," said Youfa Wang, MD, PhD, lead author of the study and associate professor with the Bloomberg School's Center for Human Nutrition. "If these trends continue, more than 86 percent of adults will be overweight or obese by 2030 with approximately 96 percent of non-Hispanic black women and 91 percent of Mexican-American men affected. This would result in 1 of every 6 health care dollars spent in total direct health care costs paying for overweight and obesity-related costs."

The researchers conducted projection analyses based on data collected over the past three decades from nationally representative surveys. Their projections illustrate the potential burden of the U.S. obesity epidemic if current trends continue.

"Our analysis also shows that over time heavy Americans become heavier," says May A. Beydoun, a former postdoctoral research fellow at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

"The health care costs attributable to obesity and overweight are expected to more than double every decade. This would account for 15 to 17 percent of total health care costs spent," Wang says. "Due to the assumptions we made and the limitations of the available data, these figures are likely an underestimation of the true financial impact."

Current standards define adults with a body mass index (BMI) between 25 and 29.9 as overweight and adults with a BMI of 30 or higher as obese. Both the overweight and obese are at an increased risk for developing a number of health conditions, including hypertension, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Researchers estimate that children and young adults may have a shorter life expectancy than their parents if the obesity epidemic is left unaddressed.

The authors warned that obesity has become a public health crisis in the U.S. Timely, dramatic and effective development and implementation of corrective programs and policies are needed to avoid the otherwise inevitable health and societal consequences implied by their projections. If current trends continue, the researchers say that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will not meet its Healthy People 2010 initiative to increase the proportion of adults who are at a healthy weight and to reduce the proportion of adults who are obese.

Source: Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

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