

Link between obesity and cancer is not widely recognized

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A new study published in the *Journal of Public Health* has shown that the majority of people in the United Kingdom do not understand the connection between weight issues and cancer. Obesity is associated with thirteen types of cancer, including those of the breast, kidney, bowel, and womb. However, after surveying 3293 adults, taken as representative of the UK population, researchers found that only a quarter of respondents were aware of the link between obesity and cancer.

Obesity is the second biggest preventable cause of [cancer](#) after smoking, leading to approximately 3.4 million deaths worldwide. Despite the fact that 63% of the English and 67% of the Scottish adult population is overweight, only 25.4% of this population listed cancer as a health issue related to being overweight when asked an unprompted question.

There were also several misconceptions about cancer types linked to [obesity](#). Researchers found greater levels of awareness about cancers of the digestive system organs, such as bowel and kidney, than for those of the reproductive organs,

such as womb or breast.

The study's authors also examined the impact of respondents' socio-economic background and found that those in a lower income group were more likely to be overweight or obese and were less aware of the link between weight issues and cancer. Modelled projections show obesity trends will increase by 2035 and the gap between the highest and lowest income groups will widen further.

Although there are currently several healthcare initiatives to address obesity issues, the study found that not all participants had seen a healthcare professional in the last 12 months. Of those who had, only 17.4% had received advice about their weight, despite 48.4% being overweight.

Those who received advice were mainly instructed on how to lose weight, rather than given information about the range of health issues associated with being [overweight](#) or obese.

Dr Jyotsna Vohra, from Cancer Research UK and study co-author, said: "We're very concerned that most people simply don't connect cancer with obesity. This study shows that only one in four know that excess weight increases the risk of cancer so we need to make the link very clear. This may go some way towards tackling the [obesity epidemic](#) which all too often begins in childhood."

"Our study also showed that GPs aren't discussing [weight](#) with patients who are too heavy as often as they might, Dr Vohra said "GPs have very little time during their appointments and should have more support to introduce sensitive issues such as obesity, with patients."

More information: Lucie Hooper et al, Public awareness and healthcare professional advice for obesity as a risk factor for cancer in the UK: a cross-sectional survey, *Journal of Public Health* (2017).

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