

Fat diabetics 'outlive thinner ones'

Oliver Moody Science Correspondent

Overweight people with type-2 diabetes live longer than patients with normal weight, according to a British study of what researchers call the "obesity paradox".

Almost 3 million people in Britain have a diagnosis of type-2 diabetes, which occurs when the body cannot produce enough insulin, a hormone that regulates blood sugar, and its glucose levels can become dangerously high. The condition has been repeatedly linked to obesity.

Doctors followed the records of more than 10,500 people in Hull for about a decade. They found that although overweight and obese patients had a higher risk of non-lethal heart prob-

lems, those who were overweight had a lower risk of dying than patients with a "normal" body-mass index [BMI]. Those who were underweight had the worst prognosis of all.

"Whether weight loss can reduce mortality risk is still unclear," they wrote in *Annals of Internal Medicine*. "Attention is shifting from weight to the general fitness of patients, [and] obesity may be an inexact surrogate for the participant's level of fitness."

The doctors suggested several explanations for the apparent paradox. Diabetes patients with a lower BMI might smoke and drink more, while obese patients might typically receive their diagnosis earlier.

The researchers admitted that important factors were missing from their

analysis. "The investigators did not have information on causes of death, patients' fitness levels or whether patients took medications to decrease their cholesterol levels," they wrote.

Nick Finer, an obesity specialist and honorary professor at the University College London Institute of Cardiovascular Science, said that the benefits of losing weight still substantially outstripped any protective effect that being overweight might have against diabetes. He also said that the study had "significant limitations".

"I would not want to see any headlines suggesting it is healthy to be fat, as this is not what the entirety of the current evidence shows," he said. "Losing weight and getting fitter are key elements of diabetes care."

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