

RESEARCH NEWS



Three in four are unaware of obesity link to cancer, says charity

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London

Cancer Research UK has urged the government to act to curb the obesity epidemic, as the charity released a survey showing that three in four adults are unaware of the link between obesity and cancer.¹

An online survey found that 75% of respondents (2457/3293) were unaware that being overweight or obese increased a person's risk of cancer.

When asked about specific cancers, respondents were more likely to see a link between being overweight or obese and cancers of the bowel (60% of respondents), liver (55%), and pancreas (47%). However, they were less likely to see a link between being overweight and breast, womb, or ovarian cancer. Just 31%, 21%, and 22%, respectively, identified such a link.

Alison Cox, director of prevention at Cancer Research UK, urged the government to highlight the link between being overweight and the risk of developing cancer and to "take action to tackle the obesity epidemic" by restricting junk food advertising aimed at children.

Peter Johnson, chief clinician for the charity, said that, although the link between being overweight and the risk of developing diabetes or heart disease was well known, public awareness of cancer risk was much lower.

He added, "Being overweight is responsible for more than 18 000 cases of cancer a year. It's the second most common cause of preventable cancer after cigarette smoking. Historically there's been a sense there was nothing one could do about the risk of getting cancer. But there are more and more things you can do: maintaining a healthy body weight and reducing obesity are two very important components."

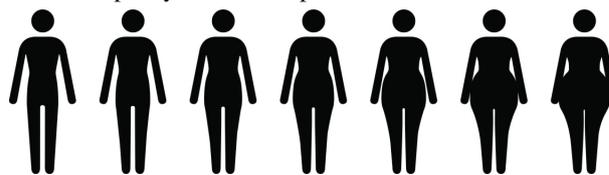
Emma Crosbie, honorary consultant clinical gynaecologist at the University of Manchester and a specialist in the link between

womb cancer and excess weight, said that cases of womb cancer had increased by 65% over the past 25 years. She noted a number of possible reasons, such as the ageing population and fewer hysterectomies.

"But perhaps the most interesting is the obesity epidemic," Crosbie added. "Womb cancer ranks highest of all cancers in association with obesity. For every 5 kg/m² increase in body mass index there's a 1.6-fold increase in the risk of cancer."

Cancer Research UK urged doctors and other health professionals to talk to patients about their weight, but they acknowledged that this was difficult.

Helen Croker, clinical research dietitian at University College London's health behaviour research centre, which the charity funds, said, "Raising the issue of weight is very challenging and one that health professionals find very difficult, not least where patients are attending an appointment which is not about their weight. Health professionals are fearful of damaging the relationship they have built up with the individual."



¹ Hooper L, Anderson A, Forster A, Rosenberg G, Vohra J; Cancer Research UK. Public knowledge of the link between obesity and cancer. Sep 2016.

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