

Metabolically healthy obesity – is it time to lay the myth to rest?

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Metabolically healthy obesity (MHO) has been defined as a condition wherein obesity does not produce metabolic complications such as dyslipidemia, impaired glucose tolerance, or metabolic syndrome.¹⁻² These individuals also have less visceral adipose tissue, smaller adipocytes, and a reduced inflammatory profile when compared to metabolically unhealthy obese individuals, and their cardiac and metabolic risk does not improve as a result of weight loss interventions.¹⁻³

However, the latest studies suggest that so-called MHO individuals may still be at an increased risk of cardiovascular disease.⁴⁻⁶ For example, a very recent study tracked the health of 90,257 women in the United States for up to 30 years. Those with excess weight were likelier to have a stroke or heart attack, even if they fit the criteria of MHO.⁷ The researchers specified that this was an association rather than cause and effect, as this was mainly found in white women, so that these findings cannot be readily generalised to other ethnic groups or to men. However, the authors concluded that "healthy obesity is not a harmless condition".⁷

Furthermore, the study showed that women who were of normal weight but metabolically unhealthy were two-and-a-half times likelier to develop cardiovascular disease than women of the same weight who were metabolically healthy. And unsurprisingly, for women who were overweight and obese, the risk was even higher.⁷

Perhaps it is indeed "finally time to dispel the concept of metabolically-healthy obesity?"¹²

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Editorial

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'Triton Fountain'

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