The Relationship Between Obesity and Arthritis: How Physicians Can Help

Notes on ARTHRITIS

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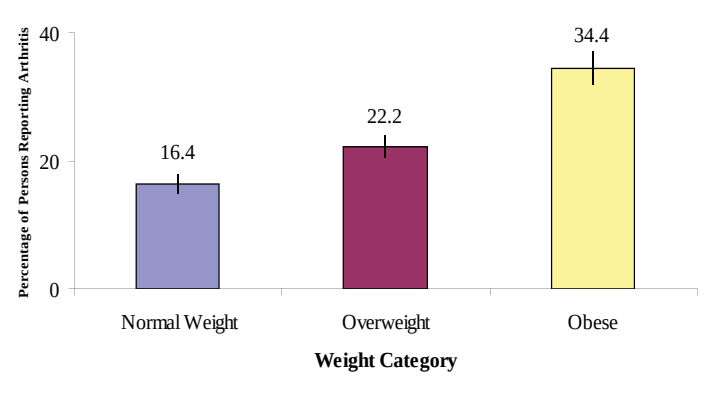
Adults who are overweight or obese are at increased risk for arthritis, coronary heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol, hypertension, respiratory problems, sleep apnea, and breast, colon, endometrial, and prostate cancers.[1] Being obese increases death from all causes.[2]

As weight increases, a person is more likely to have doctor-diagnosed arthritis. Of course, there are people at normal weight with arthritis, and some overweight people with healthy joints. But overall, the chance of developing arthritis is strongly associated with body weight. Utah survey data suggest that obese adults have doctor-diagnosed arthritis at more than twice the rate as adults at normal weight. (See Figure 1)

Among overweight and obese Utah adults with arthritis who had a routine checkup within the past 12 months, only 28.1% say they were advised to lose weight by a health professional during 2003 and 2005. Overweight and obese adults who received advice to lose weight were four times as likely to try to lose weight as those not advised to lose weight.[3]

Figure 1. Percentage of Utah Adults Reporting Arthritis by Weight Category, Utah 2005 and 2007



Source: Utah BRFSS 2005, 2007

UTAH DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Arthritis Program

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Improved awareness of the relationship between arthritis and weight may motivate patients to lose weight, and a physician's advice to lose weight could improve their management of arthritis.

1 "Overweight and Obesity: Health Consequences." The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 1April 2009 <www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity/calltoaction/fact_consequences.htm.>

2 Flegal, Katherine M., PhD, Graubard, Barry I., PhD, Williamson, David F. PhD, Mitchell H Gail, PhD, "Excess deaths associated with underweight, overweight, and obesity" JAMA 293 (2005): 1861-1867.

3 Fontaine K.R., S. Haaz, and S.J. Bartlett. "Are overweight and obese adults with arthritis being advised to lose weight?" J Clin Rheumatol 13 (2007): 12-15.

How Physicians Can Help:

- Remind staff to routinely monitor weight and advise all overweight persons to lose weight.
- Remind patients of the health benefits of weight loss and emphasize the link between weight loss, exercise, and reducing joint pain.
- Review positive changes in eating, behavior, and physical activity that can help them lose weight.
- Encourage them to be patient with their efforts and progress; explain that adhering to a diet/exercise plan can be measured in small successes.
- Monitor progress with follow-up visits. Don't leave diet/exercise plan adherence to chance.

Refer Patients to Evidenced-based Resources:

* **Living Well with Chronic Conditions**
* **EnhanceFitness**
* **Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program**
* **Arthritis Foundation Aquatics Program**
* **Arthritis Foundation Self-Help Course**

- **For further information see the Utah Arthritis Program website: www.health.utah.gov/arthritis or call Rebecca Castleton at 801-538-9340.**