

Teasing obese people may cause them to gain more weight

By Ryan Jaslow / CBS News / July 25, 2013, 2:02 PM

Trying to motivate overweight and obese friends to shed pounds through tough love, name-calling and teasing may raise their risk for becoming or staying obese, new research has found.

While some may be well-intentioned when they point out a peer's extra pounds, the new four-year study of thousands of overweight individuals shows it backfires.

"In addition to the well-known emotional and economic costs, our results suggest that weight discrimination also increases risk of obesity," wrote the researchers, led by Dr. Angelina R. Sutin, a psychological scientist at the Florida State University College of Medicine in Tallahassee. "This could lead to a vicious cycle where individuals who are overweight and obese are more vulnerable to weight discrimination, and this discrimination may contribute to subsequent obesity and difficulties with weight management."

The researchers call this discrimination "weightism."

For their study, they enlisted 6,000 participants and took their weight measurements in 2006 and 2010. They had been surveyed on whether they had been the victims of taunts about their weight.

The researchers found participants who had experienced weightism were 2.5 times more likely to become obese by the 2010 weigh-in. That finding held when researchers ruled out other risk factors associated with obesity such as age, ethnicity, education level and baseline body mass index (BMI) at the beginning of the study.

Those who were obese at the 2006 weigh-in and reported discrimination were more than three times more likely to be obese by the study's end than their counterparts who had not been the victims of weightism.

Obesity has been associated with an increased risk for depression, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

But the new study suggests mental health woes aren't the only health risk associated with being teased over weight.

"There is robust evidence that internalizing weight-based stereotypes, teasing, and stigmatizing experiences are associated with more frequent binge eating," the researchers

explained. "Overeating is a common emotion-regulation strategy, and those who feel the stress of stigmatization report that they cope with it by eating more."

Being overweight and obese can increase risks for chronic diseases including Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some types of cancers.

The researchers called for more creative approaches to combat the spread of weight discrimination. Their study was published July 24 in [PLoS One](#).

One expert not involved in the study pointed out some of this discrimination comes from doctors themselves, trying to get their patients to lose weight.

Indeed, a [study from Johns Hopkins](#) researchers released in April found doctors were less likely to "bond" with their obese patients, potentially making them less likely to adhere to treatment recommendations.

"I have worked for many years to help my clinical colleagues provide constructive and compassionate weight-management counseling," Dr. David Katz, director of the Yale University Prevention Research Center, told [HealthDay](#). "Obesity bias, or weightism, by medical professionals or our society at large is the literal addition of insult to injury."

© 2013 CBS Interactive Inc. All Rights Reserved.