

# Add cancer to list of obesity-related diseases

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**Rex Mowat, MD**

Obesity has been proven to increase the risk of developing a wide range of serious or potentially life-threatening ailments, such as high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke, type-2 diabetes, and sleep apnea. According to Dr. Rex Mowat of the Toledo Clinic Cancer Centers,

you can add cancer to that list, as well.

“Obesity is clearly linked to six forms of cancer, including postmenopausal breast cancer as well as cancers of the colon, uterus, esophagus, kidney, and prostate,” he states. “Given the fact that our nation has seen an explosion in obesity over the past 20 years, this is a major cause for concern.”

In fact, approximately 64 percent of the US population is categorized as either overweight or obese. Within that category, 33 percent are considered obese (defined as having a body mass index, or BMI, greater than 30). Even more alarming is the childhood obesity rate, which now stands at 15 percent.

How does this impact the incidence of cancer in the US? As Dr. Mowat points out, 25 to 30 percent of cancers are linked to obesity. “That amounts to about 40 to 60 thousand new cancer cases per year—all of which are completely preventable. Furthermore, about 14 percent of cancer deaths in men and 20 percent in women are related to obesity,” he adds.

The factors contributing to the current obesity epidemic are familiar ones—low levels of activity combined with eating too much of the wrong types of food. However, exactly how obesity increases cancer

risk is not fully understood. Nor is it completely clear whether cancer risk increases the longer one is obese or whether losing weight after having been obese makes a difference—primarily because so few people actually succeed in losing weight and keeping it off.

One recent study of women with breast cancer offered some encouraging results. Women participating in the study were put on hormonal therapy, and this was shown to improve the cure rate. Interestingly, improvement was also seen in the cure rate for those who modified their eating habits by adopting a traditional Japanese diet, which is significantly lower in fat (especially animal fat) than the typical Western diet is. But, cautions Dr. Mowat, much more data needs to be gathered before we can draw conclusions from these results.

“Still, even if modifying your diet and losing weight doesn’t succeed in reducing your cancer risk or doesn’t make as much of a difference as we hope, there’s no harm in trying and it doesn’t cost a thing. Besides, eating better and shedding pounds will make you healthier in a host of other ways,” says Dr. Mowat.

Though many questions remain about the correlation between excess body fat and cancer risk, Dr. Mowat can say with certainty that it’s critical to educate children about the risks of obesity before they begin to gain extra pounds and ultimately graduate into obese adults. “Just as with smoking prevention, the key to preventing obesity is education. We’ve got to get into the school system and encourage our kids to increase their activity and make better food choices as early as possible. Once they develop those cravings for unhealthy foods and start to put on weight, it’s very difficult to change that pattern because the brain actually lays down new neural pathways based on prior behav-

iors. In essence, then, the brain becomes hard-wired to crave unhealthy foods almost like an addict. That’s why it’s so critical to avoid this behavior in the first place,” he observes.

More and more patients diagnosed with cancer are choosing the comprehensive outpatient cancer services available at the Toledo Clinic Cancer Centers. The multidisciplinary center, which consists of eight partners, offers a full range of imaging services, including X-ray, CAT scan, MRI, PET scan, and ultrasound; chemotherapy services; IV services; laboratory services; an outpatient surgery center; access to the latest clinical trials; and multiple sites of service (including the main location at 4235 Secor Road and satellite centers in Maumee, Bowling Green, Oregon, Adrian, and Monroe) for patient convenience.

“Also, we avidly use nurse practitioners and other support staff to aid and assist us, and we tend to put more patients in large clinical trials than any other facility. In fact, 80 to 90 percent of the local patients that go on National Cancer Institute-backed trials are enrolled by the Toledo Clinic Cancer Centers. For those individuals who need a second opinion or a treatment that’s not available locally, we’re also linked with larger cancer centers such as the Karmanos Cancer Institute in Detroit and the Cleveland Clinic. Above all, we know the state of the art, and we consistently strive to provide better, more cost-effective treatment and outcomes,” remarks Dr. Mowat.

*For more information about cancer and its connection to obesity, the Toledo Clinic Cancer Centers, or the latest cancer clinical trials, please call 419-479-5605.*

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