

Obesity Impacts Many Organs -- Not Just Appearance

By ACSH Staff — December 2, 2008

Many Americans may be feeling the need to make a fat-fighting New Year's resolution after holiday bingeing. Obesity affects many more aspects of health than is commonly recognized, as described in a new book by the American Council on Science and Health, [Obesity and Its Health Effects](#) [1]. In seventeen chapters, each reviewed by an expert in the pertinent medical field, the publication describes how obesity impairs the function of virtually every body system.

In his preface to [Obesity and Its Health Effects](#) [1], Dr. Daniel T. Stein of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine observes, "deaths due to heart attacks, stroke, and cancer, which have rapidly declined in the past, are now leveling off and in some cases increasing due to obesity-related conditions."

Consider some other examples of the documented effects of obesity on the body:

- The skeletal system: obesity increases the load on weight-bearing joints such as the hips and knees and increases the risk of developing arthritis.
- The gastrointestinal system: obesity increases the risk of two very painful conditions -- gallstones and pancreatitis.
- The skin: obesity is associated with an increased risk of psoriasis as well as of bacterial and fungal skin infections.
- The respiratory system: obese people are more likely to develop sleep apnea -- a condition in which the sleeper's breathing is interrupted during the night, resulting in repeated awakenings and a lack of restful sleep. Obesity is also associated with adult-onset asthma.
- The reproductive system: obesity can lessen women's chances of becoming pregnant and decrease men's fertility.

Dr. Gilbert Ross, ACSH medical director, notes, "Most people probably have no idea how wide-ranging the health effects of obesity can be. The increased risk of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases are most widely appreciated, but many of the other effects are known only to medical professionals."

"Our purpose in compiling this summary of obesity's health effects in one consumer-friendly book," said ACSH president Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, "was to educate people about how obesity poses a wide variety of serious health risks -- it's certainly not simply a cosmetic issue."

The American Council on Science and Health is an independent, non-profit consumer education organization concerned with issues related to food, nutrition, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, lifestyle, the environment, and health. ACSH, directed and advised by a consortium of over 350 physicians and scientists, urges Americans to focus their efforts on things that matter -- such as maintaining a healthy body weight and not smoking -- rather than the countless pieces of nonsensical or trivial

health advice that fill the news.

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