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## Obesity-Cancer Link Unknown to Many Women

By Anne Harding

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Many women don't know that obesity increases their risk of several types of cancer, a new survey published in the journal *Obstetrics & Gynecology* shows.

Women's lack of knowledge about excess weight and the most common gynecologic malignancy, endometrial cancer, is particularly worrying, Dr. Pamela T. Soliman of M. D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston and her colleagues say. "We need to be doing a better job of educating our patients," Soliman told Reuters Health.

Women who were overweight were four times more likely to develop cancer of the uterine lining, Soliman and her team note in their report, while obesity boosts the risk by six-fold. Obese women also are at greater risk of breast and colon cancer. Excess weight also increases mortality from many cancers, with the strongest association seen for endometrial cancer; heavy women are 6.25 times more likely to die from the disease.

To investigate awareness of the obesity-cancer link, Soliman and her colleagues surveyed 1,545 women, 28 percent of whom were normal weight. Another 24 percent were overweight, while 45 percent were obese. Ninety-one percent of the study participants had health insurance.

Just 42 percent knew that obesity increased their risk of endometrial cancer, while 53 percent knew that colon cancer is associated with obesity and 54 percent were aware that excess weight increases breast cancer risk.

The women in the current study were fairly well educated, with most having a college or professional degree, Soliman noted, and the great majority had health insurance. "Even patients who are routinely seeing their physician weren't aware that obesity increases their risk," she said.

Vaginal bleeding is a key symptom of endometrial cancer in post-menopausal women, while bleeding between periods can be a sign of the disease in women who are still menstruating, Soliman said. Seventy-five percent of endometrial cancer cases are caught early, and early-stage disease can typically be cured with surgery, she added. "It's a relatively curable disease and that's why it's so important if women have symptoms to seek care."

**SOURCE:** *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, October 2008.



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