

WHAT LIFESTYLE CHOICES PLACE PEOPLE AT-RISK OF OBESITY? FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH OVERWEIGHT/OBESITY IN ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE SOUTH AFRICAN POPULATIONS

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Chronic diseases are found in all ethnic groups in South Africa. These include coronary heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and some types of nutrition and nicotine-related cancers. The main reason for these diseases is thought to be poor lifestyle choices, such as unhealthy diets and lack of exercise, cigarette smoking, stress, and overweight. Nearly one out of three Black women in South Africa are obese and one out of two are overweight.

This study, published in this edition of *Ethnicity & Disease*, examined specific factors that may be the cause of the development of obesity in different population groups in South Africa. The authors report the results of a mail-back survey sent to a sample of working adults.

Through the information collected, certain factors were linked to obesity. In this study group, you were more likely to be overweight if you were Black, had not finished high school,

did not conduct any physical activity, and had at least one overweight parent.

On the other hand, you would be protected from becoming overweight if you had never eaten large amounts of food and then induced vomiting, had not tried to lose weight in the past year or described yourself to be of normal weight, or reported having excellent health. Other factors, which did not appear to have an influence on weight gain, were employment status, income, eating high fat food items, alcohol consumption, and smoking.

This study points out the importance of being aware of family history and other factors that place an individual at-risk of obesity. If you are a member of certain ethnic groups (for example, Black women), you may be more likely to become obese. Keep in mind the importance of physical activity throughout your life and the importance of healthy eating and sensible weight management in order to prevent eating disorders.