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Bulging waists are a cancer risk

After diabetes and heart disease, obesity is now being linked with some forms of cancers

Jaya Shroff Bhalla

BULGING WAISTLINES could also be an early warning for some cancers, say experts, adding another disease to the already long list of problems —hypertension, diabetes and heart diseases, to name a few — associated with being overweight.

"Analysis of 221 data sets from 141 articles, including 282,137 case studies from around the world shows that obesity could cause a five-fold increase in cancer cases in the next decade," said Dr Paulette Mehta, professor of clinical haematology in University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, who is in India for the International Conference of Translational Pharmacology at the AIIMS, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

"Obesity, which was so far the second most important preventable cause of cancer, is quickly taking the first spot replacing smoking. Especially in countries such as the US and the UK," she added.

Other experts say that unlike tobacco, obesity is a risk factor, but

not a direct cause for the disease. "Unlike tobacco that directly causes cancer, obesity is slightly different as it kills slowly.

Hormone levels are high in obese people, putting them at risk of cancers of the breast, colon, ovarian, endometrium (inside the uterus) and gall bladder," said Dr Mehta. Being overweight is also linked with cancers of the kidney and pancreas.

Weight is measured using the Body Mass Index (BMI), which calculates weight in relation to the height. A healthy weight is defined as a BMI below 23. In men, five kg increase in BMI is strongly associated with esophageal, thyroid, renal and colon cancer. For women, five kg increase in BMI could lead to gall bladder, renal and endometrial cancer. Even within the healthy

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some cancers. Women also have a seven per cent higher risk of developing breast cancer if they have a BMI approaching 25 instead of 20, scientists have found. "While obe-

sity is a risk factor it cannot be the pinpointed as the only factor for cancer there have to be other contributory factors," said Dr Vedant Kabra, surgical oncologist at Max Healthcare.

Risk factors in breast cancer, for example, include a family history, extended menstrual cycle (early inception and late menopause), not having children or having them at a later age, and not breast-feeding them. "Similarly, for colon cancer, bad diet, family history, sedentary lifestyle plays a crucial role," said Dr Kabra.

Obese people do not respond to cancer treatment well either. "There are more side effects in fat people as treatments react on the flab rather than affecting the desired areas."

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FIVE STEPS TO STAY HEALTHY

Body Fat - A body mass index (BMI) of 21 to 23, and avoid weight gain during adulthood

Physical Activity - 30 to 60 minutes of moderate physical activity, like brisk walking, every day

Diet - Avoid sugary drinks and energy-dense fast food. Eat five portions of green vegetables each day and limit refined starchy food.

Limit salt intake to 6 grams per day and red meat to 500 grams per week.

Alcohol - limit daily intake to one drink for women, two drinks for men. Do not binge drink.

Dietary Supplements - Avoid them, except in special cases such as folic acid during pregnancy