[IMAGE]

The Spread of Social Obesity

By Editorial Staff

Obesity is a major public health problem in the United States. According to new research published in *The New England Journal of Medicine,* obesity isn't just about food and exercise - it can be described as "socially contagious," meaning it is influenced by the habits of those around us.

After studying 12,000 socially interconnected people who had participated in the Framingham Heart Study, researchers found that people are 57 percent more likely to become obese if they have a friend who becomes obese, 40 percent more likely if a sibling becomes obese and 37 percent more likely if a spouse becomes obese. If one of two mutual friends becomes obese, the other's chance of becoming obese increases by 171 percent, even if they are hundreds of miles away from each other. Correlations were particularly strong with family and friends of the same gender.

On a positive note, when a family member or friend lost weight, those with close social bonds also lost weight. Of course, genetics and other factors continue to play a role in obesity and should not be ignored. If you're looking to lose weight, build a strong, supportive social network with like-minded people and talk to your doctor before making any changes in your diet or exercise routine.

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