



Obesity

VA research on obesity focuses on areas such as examining the biological mechanisms involved in weight gain and weight loss; comparing the safety and effectiveness of various obesity treatments; and identifying the best strategies to promote exercise and healthy eating among veterans, thus preventing overweight and obesity in the first place. These efforts complement VA's "MOVE!" program, a national weight-management and exercise program designed by the VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention.

Examples of VA research advances

- **Pedometers result in modest weight loss**—Researchers with VA and the University of Michigan reviewed data from nine studies and determined that on average, people who used a pedometer to track and motivate their walking were able to lose about a pound every 10 weeks, or about five pounds per year. The weight loss resulted from an average step-count increase of between 2,000 and 4,000 steps—one to two miles—per day. While such weight loss may be less than dramatic, pedometer-based walking programs are generally endorsed by experts for the range of possible health benefits they confer, such as increased aerobic fitness and lower blood pressure.
- **Surgery effective for severe obesity**—Researchers with VA and RAND Health analyzed 225 existing studies and concluded that bariatric surgery is more effective than drugs to help severely obese patients lose weight, and that most drugs prescribed for overweight and obesity do promote modest weight loss, at least in the short term, but only when combined with exercise and changes in diet. The researchers said bariatric surgery appears to improve or even eliminate diabetes, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, and high cholesterol, but the complication rate can be as high as 20 percent.
- **Low-carb lifestyles**—A team at the Durham VA Medical Center and Duke University has published several studies documenting that eating a diet lower in carbohydrates tends to lead to weight reduction, lower triglycerides, and other benefits.

Facts About Obesity

Obesity has skyrocketed in the past four decades and reached epidemic proportions. Two in three Americans are overweight, and nearly one in three is obese. The problem may be even more severe among those who turn to VA for their health care, with one study finding that 68 percent of these veterans were overweight and 37 percent obese. This trend carries major implications for American health care, since obesity increases the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis, and other diseases.

