

Another Reason to Shed Excess Pounds

It is well known that among older adults, obesity increases the risk of functional decline and disability, which, in turn, leads to poorer quality of life and increased health care costs.

Excess body weight negatively affects our ability to carry out our daily activities even before we become aware of difficulties, according to new findings from the UF College of Medicine Department of Aging and Geriatric Research, published in the journal *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics* under the title “Obesity and use of compensatory strategies to perform common daily activities in pre-clinically disable older adults”.

Physical disability in some older adults occurs gradually over time. And although many people don't notice the subtle changes in how they perform their daily tasks, they spontaneously develop ways to compensate. Such coping methods include holding on to handrails when climbing stairs or using arm rests to propel the body out of a chair.

The UF study, led by assistant professor Todd Manini, Ph.D. and funded by the National Institutes of Health and National Institute on Aging, revealed that among 259 older adults, those who were obese were almost 20 times more likely than their normal-weight counterparts to use such methods to compensate.

Even among people who did not say they had day-to-day difficulties, obesity made it especially hard to do tasks that involve the lower limbs. In addition, the extra weight could cause people to become fearful of moving, so they no longer engage in their usually activities.

“That’s why maintaining a healthy weight is key to reducing the risk of disability later,” Manini said.

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