LIVER CANCER WARNING: Men who are overweight in their late teens at higher risk

MEN who are overweight in their late teens have a higher risk of developing liver cancer in later life, a new study suggests.

They are also more likely to develop other severe liver disease, according to the research published in the journal Gut.

Experts examined data from more than 1.2 million Swedish men enlisted for conscription between 1969 and 1996.

The data was then linked with other health registers to assess whether these men went on to develop severe liver disease.

The researchers then performed statistical analysis to assess whether having a high body mass index (BMI) aged 17 to 19 when the men signed up to military service was linked to an increase risk of disease.

Overall, there were 5,281 cases of severe liver disease including 251 cases of liver cancer during the follow up period - one year after conscription until 31 December 2012.

The researchers, led by Dr Hannes Hagstrom, of the Centre for Digestive Diseases at the Karolinska University Hospital, Stockholm, Sweden, discovered that overweight men were nearly 50 per cent more likely and obese men more than twice as likely to develop liver disease in later life than men of normal weight.

Signs and symptoms of liver cancer

Men who developed type 2 diabetes during the follow up period also had a higher risk, regardless of how much they weighed when they signed up to military conscription.

“The risk of severe liver disease was highly affected by a diagnosis of T2DM (type 2 diabetes) during follow-up, across all BMI categories,” the authors added.

They found that obese men with type 2 diabetes were three times more likely to have liver problems when they were older compared with non-diabetic, normal weight men.

The researchers warned that increasing numbers of people who are overweight or obese could lead to rises in the number of cases of severe liver disease in the future.

“Interventions to reduce the increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity should be implemented from an early age to reduce the future burden of severe liver disease on individuals and society,” they concluded.