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**Apples just as healthy as pears, says study of body shape."**  
**BYLINE:** Stephen Adams  
  
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BEING an "apple" shape is no less healthy than being a "pear", according to a new study that turns the long-held belief on its head.

Doctors have long thought that people with an apple figure - a tendency to store fat around the belly rather than the hips - were at a higher risk of heart disease and stroke.

In 2005, a study seemed to confirm that theory.

It found that having a higher waist-to-hip ratio - in other words being an "apple" - was three times more powerful an indicator of heart attack risk than simply being overweight.

Dr Arya Sharma, the director of the Canadian Obesity Network, who led that study, said it would lead to doctors "forgetting about their scales and taking out their tape measures".

But a recent analysis of records from 220,000 people in 58 studies, each monitored for over a decade, has cast doubt on this finding.

It discovered that having a higher waist-to-hip ratio was no better a predictor of heart disease and stroke risk than being generally overweight, as measured by body mass index (BMI).

BMI is calculated by dividing one's weight in kilograms by the square of one's height in metres.

The researchers, led by Cambridge University, concluded in The Lancet that their findings "reliably refute" previous recommendations to measure waist-tohip ratios rather than BMI.

"We have shown that BMI, waist circumference, and waist-to-hip ratio each have a similar strength of association with cardiovascular disease risk," they wrote.

Furthermore, the new study found that the really powerful indicators were not body weight or shape at all, but what was going on in the blood.

Once blood pressure, a history of diabetes and cholesterol levels were taken into account, neither body weight nor shape added much in terms of predicting a cardiovascular event.

Researchers at Cambridge University's cardiovascular epidemiology unit said: "This study shows that measuring your waist is no better for calculating your cardiovascular risk than calculating your BMI.

It underlines the value of GPs continuing to measure cholesterol and blood pressure levels, irrespective of body shape."

However, they emphasised that being overweight or obese was still "the main risk factor for heart disease, which can of course be influenced by lifestyle choices".

The authors believe that previous studies could have been affected by selection bias and reverse causality - when cause and effect are mixed up.

But Dr Mike Knapton, the associate medical director at the British Heart Foundation, which co-funded the study with the Medical Research Council, said it was "not time to throw away the tape measure just yet".

Being overweight and having high cholesterol and blood pressure often went hand-in-hand, he said, so gauging a person's weight was a useful initial "screen" of whether they might go on to suffer heart disease or stroke.

Two-thirds of British adults are either overweight or obese.

Cardiovascular disease remains the country's number one killer, accounting for more than 191,000 deaths every year.

The Mirror

March 11, 2011 Friday   
3 Star Edition

**MEASURING UP FAT RISK**  
  
**BYLINE:** DANNY BUCKLAND  
  
**SECTION:** NEWS; Pg. 24  
  
**LENGTH:** 131 words

By DANNY BUCKLAND, Health Correspondent

OBESE adults who carry fat around the waist don't have an increased risk of heart attacks or strokes, researchers said today.

This contradicts previous claims that apple-shaped fat people were three times more likely to have these issues.

A consortium of 200 scientists from 17 countries carried out the latest study, funded by the Medical Research Council and British Heart Foundation and published in The Lancet.

Obesity is measured using weight and height to give a body mass index but some believe a better guide to risk is a waist measurement.

Dr Mike Knapton, of the BHF, said: "Regardless of how you measure it, being obese is bad for your heart.

This study suggests that measuring your waist is no better than calculating your body mass index."

11 March 2011 Last updated at 00:16

**BBC**

**Doubts emerge over heart risk to 'apple shape'**

By Dominic Hughes Health correspondent, BBC News

Doubts have been raised over the idea that being overweight and "apple shaped" increases heart attack risk.

[A study in the Lancet](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736%2811%2960105-0/abstract) found the risk of heart attack was not increased by fat being concentrated around the waist.

It contradicts previous work that found overweight people with "apple shaped" bodies were three times as likely to suffer heart attacks than those with more generally distributed fat.

But experts warned obesity was bad for the heart, no matter where the fat was.

The authors of the study say that obesity is still a major risk factor for heart disease, but they argue there is confusion about the best way to measure it.

One well known measure is the Body Mass Index (BMI) which relates weight to height.

Apples and pears

But previous research had also suggested that people with fat deposits in the middle of their body - known as an "apple shape" - were at much greater risk.

This method uses the "waist-to-hip" ratio and compares the distance around the hips and waist to measure what is known as central obesity.

It can tell if someone is "apple shaped - with a bulging middle - or "pear shaped", with a narrower waist and fatter hips and bottom.

Others have suggested concentrating on a measurement of the waist alone.

But this new study, which looked at 220,000 people over almost 10 years, found that all three measures indicated risk of heart attack or stroke.

The study was led by Professor John Danesh from Cambridge University and concluded that none of the measures on their own improved the prediction of heart disease, especially when doctors could also assess other warning signs like blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Writing in the Lancet, Professor Danesh said: "Whether assessed singly or in combination, body-mass index, waist circumference, and waist-to-hip ratio do not improve prediction of first-onset cardiovascular disease when additional information exists on blood pressure, history of diabetes, and cholesterol measures."

The study was funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the British Heart Foundation (BHF).

Obesity is still bad for you

The BHF's associate medical director Dr Mike Knapton said it was clear that no matter how you measure it, obesity is bad for your heart.

"This study suggests that measuring your waist is no better than calculating your BMI but it's not time to throw away the tape measure just yet.

"We tend to underestimate our body shape and size, so measuring our waist or checking our BMI are both quick and easy ways we can check our health at home.

"We should also remember there are other heart risk factors we need to think about too, such as blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes and smoking.

"Anyone over 40 who's worried about their waist measurement or BMI should ask at their GP surgery for a heart health assessment, which will take into account all cardiovascular risk factors and provide practical advice on how you can reduce your risk."

Professor Stephen Holgate of the MRC said the main worry about obesity was that it led to other illnesses.

"Around three-fifths of type 2 diabetes and one-fifth of heart disease cases are attributable to excess body fat. Six cancers are also linked to obesity.

"The percentage of UK adults who are obese has increased by 50% in the last decade, and obesity in children continues to grow at an alarming rate."

**MAIL ONLINE**

**Medical U-turn on ‘apple-shape’ warnings: It isn’t especially dangerous to the heart**

By [Daily Mail Reporter](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/search.html?s=y&authornamef=Daily+Mail+Reporter)  
**UPDATED:** 01:13, 12 March 2011

A medical U-turn has cast doubt on warnings that being overweight and 'apple-shaped' is especially dangerous to the heart.

Researchers who studied 220,000 adults found that fat concentrated around the waist did not increase the risk of heart attacks and strokes any more than general obesity.

Their findings contradict previous evidence that obese individuals with 'apple-shaped' bodies are three times more likely to suffer a heart attack than those with other kinds of fat distribution.

The authors of the new research argue that earlier studies had delivered a misleading message because of design flaws.

Experts said the results should help end confusion over different international guidelines.

Obesity as measured by a person's Body Mass Index, which relates weight and height, and is a known risk factor for heart disease.

But recent research has suggested that being fat around the middle is especially bad, increasing the risk over and above that resulting from having a high BMI.

Some experts have even challenged the usefulness of BMI as an assessment tool, arguing in favour of the tape measure instead.

The new investigation involved examining data from 58 studies which collectively monitored more than 220,000 adults for almost a decade.

During this period, more than 14,000 participants suffered a heart attack or stroke.

Analysis confirmed that obesity was a major risk factor for heart disease.

But the risk remained the same whether worked out from BMI scores - calculated by dividing a person's weight in kilograms by their height in metres squared - waist circumference, or waist-to-hip

Waist-to-hip ratio compares the distance around the hips and waist to assess levels of 'central obesity'.

It shows if a person is 'apple-shaped' with a bulging middle or 'pear-shaped' with a narrower waist and fatter hips and bottom.

A consortium of 200 scientists from 17 countries carried out the study, funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC) and British Heart Foundation (BHF).

The findings are published today in The Lancet medical journal online.

The authors, led by Professor John Danesh, from Cambridge University, wrote: 'Whether assessed singly or in combination, body-mass index, waist circumference, and waist-to-hip ratio do not improve prediction of first-onset cardiovascular disease when additional information exists on blood pressure, history of diabetes, and cholesterol measures.

This finding applies to a wide range of circumstances and clinically relevant subgroups.'

Dr Mike Knapton, associate medical director at the BHF, said: 'Regardless of how you measure it, being obese is bad for your heart.

This study suggests that measuring your waist is no better than calculating your BMI but it's not time to throw away the tape measure just yet.

'We tend to underestimate our body shape and size, so measuring our waist or checking our BMI are both quick and easy ways we can check our health at home.

'We should also remember there are other heart risk factors we need to think about too, such as blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes and smoking.'

**REUTERS**

**"Apple" obesity heart risk theory goes pear-shaped**

By Kate Kelland

LONDON | Fri Mar 11, 2011 12:04am GMT

New research is challenging previous medical notions that "apple-shaped" people with more fat around their waist are at higher risk of heart attacks and strokes than "pear-shaped" people with fatter bottoms and hips.

A study of 220,000 people published Friday confirmed that being obese -- having a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or more -- is a major risk factor for heart disease, but found the distribution of fat on the body has no impact on that risk.

"Regardless of how you measure it, being obese is bad for your heart.

This study suggests that measuring your waist is no better than calculating your BMI," said Mike Knapton, associate medical director at the British Heart Foundation charity, which part-funded the study.

BMI is widely used by researchers and doctors to determine people's health risks.

It is calculated by dividing weight in kilograms by height in meters squared.

A person who is 5 feet 5 inches tall has a BMI of 25 and is classified as overweight at 150 pounds (68 kg), and has a BMI of 30 and is classified as obese at 180 pounds (82 kg).

According to researchers writing in The Lancet medical journal, previous studies have suggested that people with "central obesity" -- often described as apple-shaped people -- have a three times greater risk of heart attack than people with general obesity as measured by BMI.

But other experts have questioned those findings, so a large international consortium of scientists set out to try and settle the issue.

Their results suggest that while monitoring weight and fat levels may be important to try to get people to change their lifestyles, the best predictors of future heart risk are measures of blood pressure, cholesterol and history of diabetes.

The Lancet study involved taking weight, hip, waist, blood pressure, cholesterol and other key data from more than 220,000 adults -- who had no previous history of heart disease -- and tracking them for almost a decade.

During that time, around 14,000 of them had heart attacks or strokes.

John Danesh of Britain's Cambridge University, one of the almost 200 scientists from 17 countries who worked on the study, said the findings showed that "basically, all obesity types are broadly as bad as each other" when it comes to heart health.

Danesh said the findings should help guide medical practice worldwide because at the moment, national and international guidelines provide differing recommendations about the value of assessing obesity levels to predict future heart risk.

"This study very clearly shows that if conventional risk factors (such as blood pressure and cholesterol) have already been measured, then measures of levels of fat add very little," he said in a telephone interview.

Obesity has become a global epidemic, with more than half a billion people, or one in 10 adults worldwide, now considered to be obese -- more than double the number in 1980.

Cardiovascular diseases -- which can lead to heart attacks, strokes and other fatal events -- are the top cause of death worldwide, killing around 17.1 million people a year, according to the World health Organization (WHO).

The Express

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**Pot belly may not be a heart risk after all**  
**BYLINE:** By Victoria Fletcher  
  
**SECTION:** NEWS; 22  
  
**LENGTH:** 388 words

A experts have even challenged BMI as an assessment tool, arguing in favour of the tape measure instead.

The new research examined data from 58 studies that monitored more than 220,000 adults for a decade.

During this time, more than 14,000 had a heart attack or stroke.

Analysts said obesity was a major risk factor for heart disease.

But it was the same whether measuring BMI, waist circumference or waist-to-hip ratio.

Waist-to-hip ratio shows if a person is "apple-shaped" with a bulging middle or "pear-shaped" with a narrower waist and fatter hips and bottom.

A consortium of 200 scientists from 17 countries carried out the study, funded by the Medical Research Council and the British Heart Foundation