

## Obesity among older adults: Can the use of body mass index alone result in an incomplete diagnosis?

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### Abstract

There are many predictions that the number of obese adults, including the elderly, will increase in the coming years. However, the most recent report in the Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA) indicated that in 2009-2010, the prevalence of obesity (based on Body Mass Index (BMI)) was 35.5% among adult men and 35.8% among adult women, with no significant change compared with 2003-2008. The 35.5% figure is still a very high figure and a 2009-2010 CDC report revealed that 39.7% of older adults (60+) were obese. The prevalence of obesity among older adults causes several health and mobility complications to the patient, in addition to a financial burden to the society. Today obesity is diagnosed primarily based on BMI and while this is a valuable measure, studies suggest that other factors such as body composition, fat distribution and movement assessment are important to include in a complete diagnosis. Obesity in older adults is linked to many chronic diseases including Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cancer osteoarthritis, and coronary heart disease. Aside from chronic diseases, obesity in older adults has also been linked to a loss of independence. Obesity in combination with low muscle strength in the elderly years has been shown to decrease walking speed and result in greater risk of physical disability. It is therefore imperative that health professionals and academic researchers be engaged in determining the most accurate total set of tools (not only BMI) to assess overweight and obese individuals and to work to mitigate this widespread disorder.

### Biography

Shahla Wunderlich is currently Professor of Nutrition and Food Science at Montclair State University. Dr. Wunderlich received the Ph.D. degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Nutritional Biochemistry and Metabolism. She has received several grants, including from the US Department of Health and Human Services, to provide nutrition education, counseling and physical activity for older adults. Her research findings about maintaining wellness for older adults, and maternal and child nutrition have been published and presented at national and international professional meetings. She has received many awards, including the Outstanding Dietetic Educator Award from the American Dietetic Association.