

Your weight, diet and COVID-19

Adena Neglia, MS, RDN, CDN

There have been recent reports that body weight is an independent risk factor for COVID-19. One news outlet reports that nearly two-thirds of the patients admitted to critical care units in the UK were "overweight". A writer from The New York Times states, "the huge burden of obesity and other chronic conditions among Americans puts most of us at direct risk."

However, if we skip the reporters and get to the source, the most recent evidence indicates that the percentage of high-BMI people with critical COVID cases is the same – if not lower than – the percentage of the general population. This information is detailed in the latest [ICNARC COVID-19 report](#).

This is not the first time "obesity" has been linked to or blamed for health conditions. We must keep in mind that most studies on "obesity" fail to include variables such as weight stigma, weight cycling, and disordered eating – all of which can lend themselves to chronic health conditions and poor health outcomes. Weight cycling has been associated with an increased risk of heart problems and higher mortality from all causes – this is likely because of fluctuations in blood pressure or cardiovascular risk factors. In addition, the stress of yo-yo dieting and restriction, in general, is very hard on the body.

Disordered eating can be a problem for anyone in any body size and can be extremely detrimental – mentally and physically.

Not to mention that people in larger bodies may push off routine check-ups and doctor's appointments because they feel stigmatized by their health care providers. They may prolong getting treatment for preventable conditions – and become sicker in the long run.

Even if the research takes a turn and shows that being in a larger body puts you at risk for COVID-19, there are no ethical recommendations that can be provided to change that. It is not healthy to severely restrict your food and quickly drop weight. Dieting is not another burden we need to have right now.

So, larger bodied or not, the recommendations to stay safe and COVID-19 free are the same across the board:

- Wash your hands
- Rest
- Drink plenty of water
- Include nutrient dense foods when possible
- Eat adequate amounts of food
- Move in any way that feels joyful and comfortable
- Be kind (especially to yourself)
- Take care of your mental health

While many people may have limited resources and funds at this time, focus on the basics.

There are no “superfoods” or supplements that will prevent you from getting sick - so save your money. Stick to food first, and if that means more boxed pasta, frozen vegetables, and canned tuna – that’s perfectly fine. If you feel like you are struggling to put meals together or aren’t sure if you are getting everything you need, feel free to reach out to us at Performance360@mountsinai.org for more resources