

High body fat levels associated with increased breast cancer risk in women with normal BMI

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Among postmenopausal women with normal body mass index (BMI), those with higher body fat levels had an increased risk for invasive breast cancer, according to data presented at the American Association for Cancer Research Special Conference Obesity and Cancer: Mechanisms Underlying Etiology and Outcomes, held Jan. 27-30.

"It was previously unknown whether individuals who have a normal BMI but increased [body fat](#) have an increased risk of developing [cancer](#)," said Neil Iyengar, MD, medical oncologist at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. "Our findings show that the risk of invasive breast cancer is increased in [postmenopausal women](#) with normal BMI and higher levels of body fat, meaning that a large proportion of the population has an unrecognized risk of developing cancer."

"Body fat levels are typically measured via BMI, which is a ratio of weight to height. While BMI may be a convenient method to estimate body fat, it is not an exact way to determine whole body fat levels, as muscle mass and bone density cannot be distinguished from [fat mass](#)," said Thomas Rohan, MBBS, PhD, DHSc, professor and chair, Department of Epidemiology and Population Health at Albert Einstein College of Medicine. Dual energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA) is a technology that can specifically measure for [fat content](#), resulting in a more accurate assessment of total [body fat levels](#), he explained.

The investigators analyzed data from the Women's Health Initiative (WHI), an observational study that follows the health of postmenopausal women ages 50-79. The study included participants who had a normal BMI (between 18.5 to

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