

## Economic downturn will worsen obesity epidemic

Levels of debt have been associated with an increased risk of being fat. Researchers writing in the open access journal BMC Public Health blame the trend on the high price of healthy food, and a tendency for people worried by debt to comfort eat.

Eva Munster, from the University of Mainz, Germany, worked with a team of researchers to study more than 9000 people, finding that 25% of the 949 people in debt were medically obese, compared to only 11% of the remaining 8318 participants. She said, "The recent credit crunch will have health implications for private households. While income, education and occupational status are frequently used in definitions of socioeconomic status, levels of debt are not usually considered. We've shown that debt can be associated with the probability of being overweight or obese, independent of these factors".

The researchers explain that debt can affect a series of risk factors for chronic diseases, for example by limiting leisure time activities and participation in social events. The quality of an individual's diet can also be negatively affected. According to Munster, "A person's ability to pick and choose the food they eat often depends on the financial resources they have available. Energy-dense foods such as sweets or fatty snacks are often less expensive compared to food with lower energy density such as fruit or vegetables".

1. Over-indebtedness as a marker of socioeconomic status and its association with obesity: a cross-sectional study

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