

Does How Fast You Eat Influence How Much You Weigh?

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In a recent study, Japanese researchers were curious as to whether how fast a person eats has any effect on how much they weigh.¹ Although Japan does not have the same level of obesity seen in the United States, its population has been gaining weight steadily over the past few decades.

Government employees in central Japan volunteered for the study. Each received a physical examination and was weighed, measured and surveyed with an extensive questionnaire regarding diet and lifestyle. Among the many questions study participants were asked included how much they weighed at age 20. Unknown to the subjects, a single multiple-choice question was the basis for the entire study: How fast is your rate of eating? Subjects selected from among the following responses: very slow, relatively slow, medium, relatively fast, or very fast.

Of the more than 5,000 employees surveyed, 3,737 men and 1,005 women met the inclusion criteria. Age ranged from 35 to 69. The mean age of males was 48; females 46. Results were as follows:

TABLE 1 Men - 3,337

	Very slow	Relatively slow	Medium	Relatively fast	Very fast
Number	63 (1.7%)	395 (10.6%)	1,383 (37%)	1,400 (37.5%)	496 (13.2%)
Mean age	49.3	48.8	48.5	47.9	47.2
Current body weight (pounds)	135.3	137.9	142.6	148.9	154.2
Body weight at age 20 (pounds)	122.8	123.4	127.2	130.9	133.8

TABLE 2 Women - 1,005

	Very slow	Relatively slow	Medium	Relatively fast	Very fast
Number	19 (1.9%)	116 (11.5%)	425 (42.3%)	353 (35.1%)	92 (9.2%)
Mean age	46.3	47	46	46.2	46.5
Current body weight (pounds)	110.2	112.4	116.2	118.1	124.3
Body weight at age 20 (pounds)	104.1	106.7	108.9	110.4	111.9

In this study, there was a clear relationship between speed of eating and body weight, as demonstrated by the results in tables 1 and 2 above. The questionnaire also revealed a correlation between speed of eating and quantity of food consumed. (Faster eaters consumed more calories.) There were some limitations in this study: Body weight at age 20 was estimated by the subjects, as was their speed of eating; and the people in this sample were all middle-aged Japanese citizens. Therefore, this does not necessarily mean these results would be duplicated in other groups. It does, however give us something to discuss at the dinner table.

Reference

1. Otsuka R, Tamakoshi K, Yatsuya H, et al. Eating fast leads to obesity: findings based on self-

administered questionnaires among middle-aged Japanese men and women. *J Epidemiol* 2006;16:117-124.

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