Obese individuals more prone to blood poisoning

Being obese, little physical activity and smoking increase our vulnerability for severe bloodstream infections. These factors also increase mortality.

Blood poisoning, or sepsis, is a serious infection with a mortality rate of over 20 per cent. It is a fairly common disease that affects three to four out of every thousand people in Norway annually, and kills more than six million people worldwide every year.

Researchers at the Mid-Norway Centre for Sepsis Research (NTNU, St. Olavs Hospital, Nord-Trøndelag Hospital Trust and Yale University) have taken a closer look at the relationship between lifestyle, obesity and the risk of being affected both by sepsis and the risk of death.

They have examined nearly 2,000 North-Trøndelag residents with blood poisoning who participated in the longitudinal Nord-Trøndelag Health Study (HUNT Study).

Obesity plays a major role

“We’re finding that obesity is an important risk factor for sepsis,” says doctor Julie Paulsen, an NTNU PhD candidate who is affiliated with the Department of Clinical and Molecular Medicine.

“Slightly overweight individuals with a BMI between 30 and 35 increased their risk by 30 per cent, as compared with people of normal weight. People with a BMI over 40 had three times as high a risk as those of normal weight,” says Paulsen.

“People with a BMI over 35 who smoke and are less physically active have almost five times the risk of serious blood poisoning as physically active normal-weight non-smokers.

In smokers, the risk was increased by 50 per cent as compared to never-smokers, and those who are physically inactive have almost twice as high a risk as people who exercise hard at least one hour a week.

Die more often

At the same time, research shows increased mortality among individuals who are obese compared with those who are normal weight.

Slightly overweight individuals increase their risk by 35 per cent, while people with a BMI over 40 have three times the risk of death as normal-weight individuals.

This study shows that lifestyle-related measures can reduce the incidence of serious infections.

The research was based on 64,000 participants from the HUNT study.
Obese individuals are more susceptible to blood poisoning, and also die from it more often. (Illustrative photo: Colourbox)

Gemini, NTNU Trondheim - Norwegian University of Science and Technology
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Julie Paulsen, et al., Associations of obesity and lifestyle with the risk of mortality of bloodstream infection in a general population: a 15-year follow-up of 64,027 individuals in the HUNT study, Int J Epidemiol, June 2017.

Kari Williamson

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