



# Obesity

VA research on obesity focuses on areas such as examining the biological mechanisms involved in weight gain and weight loss; comparing the safety and effectiveness of various obesity treatments; and identifying the best strategies to promote exercise and healthy eating among Veterans, thus preventing overweight and obesity in the first place. These efforts complement VA's "MOVE!" program, a national weight-management and exercise program designed by the VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention.

## *Examples of VA Research Advances*

**Caloric restriction slows aging in primates** – VA scientists and colleagues found that restricting caloric intake to about 30 percent of normal can slow aging and prevent disease in primates. Caloric restriction had shown similar effects in countless animal studies, but never in primates. The researchers, led by Dr. Richard Weindruch of the Madison VA and University of Wisconsin, reported findings from a 20-year study that involved, at one point, 76 rhesus monkeys. At the 20-year mark, half of the regular-diet monkeys survived, versus 80 percent of those eating fewer calories. Caloric restriction reduced the incidence of diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease, and brain atrophy.

**Obesity and prostate cancer** – A team with VA and Duke University Medical Center challenged past study findings suggesting that obesity is associated with a lower risk for prostate cancer. They analyzed 441 prostate biopsies and found, after adjusting for certain clinical characteristics, that obesity was actually associated with a 98-percent higher risk. In a related study, the group found that compared with normal-weight men, obese men have prostate tumors that are larger and faster-growing.

**High rate of metabolic syndrome** – Researchers at the VA Northern California Health Care System analyzed body mass index (in lieu of abdominal obesity), blood pressure, and other clinical factors among 51,000 Veterans who had filled any prescription in the system during a one-year period. At least a quarter of the Veterans had metabolic syndrome, a group of risk factors linked to cardiovascular disease and other conditions.

## Facts About Obesity

Obesity has skyrocketed in the past four decades and reached epidemic proportions. Two out of three Americans are overweight, and nearly one out of three is obese. The problem may be even more severe among those who turn to VA for their health care, with one study finding that 68 percent of these Veterans were overweight and 37 percent obese. This trend has major implications for American health care, since obesity increases the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis, and other diseases.

