Does Body Size Affect Life Span?

A woman's height and weight may determine whether she reaches age 90.

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A person's body size may influence whether he or she lives to the ripe old age of 90. But height and weight is far more likely to play a role in a woman's life span than a man's, suggest new findings published in the Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health, reports BMJ.

For the study, researchers reviewed data from the Netherlands Cohort Study, which included more than 120,000 men and women between ages 55 and 69 when it began in 1986.

At baseline, more than 7,800 participants provided detailed information on their weight and height upon entry into the study, weight at age 20 and their leisure time physical activities, including gardening, home improvements, walking, running and more. (These pastimes were grouped into sessions that lasted less than 30 minutes, 30 to 60 minutes and 90 minutes or more.)

Researchers monitored participants until death or until they reached age 90, whichever came first. Nearly 16.7 percent of men and 34.4 percent of women lived to be nonagenarians.

On average, women who lived to this age were taller, weighed less at the beginning of the study and had gained fewer pounds since age 20 than women who died before reaching this milestone.

Interestingly, height and weight weren't associated with longevity among men. But researchers noted that males who worked out for more than 90 minutes a day had a 39 percent greater chance of reaching 90 than those who engaged in less than 30 minutes of physical activity.

What's more, scientists noticed that every 30 minutes of daily exercise men performed was linked to a 5 percent increase in the likelihood they'd reach age 90.

Women who exercised more than 60 minutes each day were also more likely to reach age 90 than women who were active for only 30 minutes or less. But the women who had the best chance of making it to their 90th birthday were those who got in about one hour of exercise daily.

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