

Media release
Monday 7 May 2007

Adding more *weight* to obesity research

Researchers at the Menzies Research Institute have added more weight to research into the nation's obesity problem.

Published today in Australia's premier journal of medical practice and clinical research, *The Medical Journal of Australia*, the Menzies' research demonstrates that obesity in childhood is strongly predictive of obesity in early adulthood.

The findings show that compared with healthy-weight children, obese boys are at *five times* the risk of becoming obese young men and obese girls are at *nine times* the risk of becoming obese young women.

The 20-year follow-up of 4,571 Australian children found that 13 per cent of boys and 12 per cent of girls were obese by the time they reached their 20s and 30s.

Chief Investigator of the research and Deputy Director of Menzies, Associate Professor Alison Venn says whilst obese children were at a much higher risk of being obese in adulthood, most obese young adults in the study were *not* obese as children.

"In fact, the proportion of adult obesity that could be attributed to childhood obesity was only 6.4 per cent in males and 12.6 per cent in females.

"The study confirms that the prevention of overweight and obesity in childhood is an essential public health priority. But, it also demonstrates that we need a strong focus on obesity prevention for adolescents and young adults, as well as for children," Associate Professor Alison Venn said.

The findings come from Australia's most ambitious health and fitness study called The Childhood Determinants of Adult Health (CDAH) study.

The CDAH study involves follow-up of more than 5,000 children from across Australia who in 1985 were part of the Australian Schools Health and Fitness

Survey and aims to find out how factors in childhood affect the risk of developing cardiovascular disease and diabetes in later life.

Associate Professor Venn says much of what was known about these conditions was determined through research conducted in adults.

“There is strong evidence to suggest that the early stages of these diseases start to occur in childhood,” she said.

Associate Professor Venn says it is rare to get the opportunity to examine such a large group of people 20 years after they were originally tested and it is hoped that Menzies researchers will follow-up these people again in 10 years time.

“The information we collect from the CDAH study will help to develop new early prevention measures for heart disease, diabetes and obesity,” she said.

The research study has been predominantly funded by a \$2.3 million grant from the National Health and Medical Research Council. The National Heart Foundation, the Tasmanian Community Fund and Veolia Environmental Services have provided additional funding support.

ENDS

Associate Professor Alison Venn is available for interview:

Where: Menzies Research Institute
Level 2, 199 Macquarie Street
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When: TODAY (Monday 7 May)
11.00am

For more information contact:

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