

## Getting older, getting fatter: Here's why

A brilliant study done at the Harvard Medical School,<sup>[1]</sup> in which investigators looked at 3 cohorts that they had been following from the mid-1970s and a little bit later. The investigators looked at what contributes to the inevitable weight gain as we get older. This is an interesting problem and these studies were extremely well done. They kept records with questionnaires about weight, intake of various dietary nutrients, activity, and the development of cardiovascular problems. Their findings shouldn't really surprise us, but they give us some very solid information about what happens as we age. In general, individuals in this group gained approximately 17 pounds over the 20 years of observation. If you think about it, that's less than a pound a year, but it can add up.

They looked at the various nutrients and tried to decide which nutrients were more likely to result in an increase in weight and which were more likely to result in a reduction in weight or lower weight gain during that time. The worst offenders were starches, primarily potato products, but there was a big difference between French fries in the usual portion and a boiled or mashed potato. Sweetened beverages were offenders, as were starches of all sorts. People gained less weight with diet sodas. People also gained less weight with higher intakes of vegetables, fruit, nuts, and all the things that we used to think were good for you. It also turned out that individuals who didn't sleep very much -- under 6 hours -- or slept more than 8 hours were more likely to experience an increase in weight. The relationship between sleep and weight gain was U-shaped.

Investigators also looked at TV-watching. The men actually watched more television. The more television people watched, the more weight they gained. Men probably watched more sports at that time, explaining their longer duration of TV-watching.

One thing that was very interesting was that one of the foods that resulted in less weight gain was yogurt, this doesn't necessarily make sense. Yogurt might just be a marker for an attempt to modify one's lifestyle. According to this study, it didn't matter whether a person drank whole milk or skim milk. Weight gain was certainly more likely if a person used butter.

### References

1- Mozaffarian D, Hao T, Rimm EB, Willett WC, Hu FB. Changes in diet and lifestyle and long-term weight gain in women and men. *N Engl J Med*. 2011;364:2392-2404.