

The Body Shape That Protects Women From Diabetes

via korinmiller | October 12, 2015



Is your shape helping you or hurting you? (Photo: Getty Images)

Pear-shaped women are “significantly” less likely to develop Type 2 diabetes than those with smaller hips, according to new research.

The findings, which were presented this weekend at the American Society of Human Genetics’ annual meeting, traced the connection to a genetic variation carried by women with hips that are larger in comparison to the rest of their body.

Researchers discovered that pear-shaped women contain a genetic variant near the KLF14 gene, which regulates hundreds of other genes that determine how and where a woman's body stores fat. Different versions of that variant make a woman's cells function differently and impact her hip circumference.

The gene variation is inherited from a woman's mother and doesn't appear to have the same effect on men. According to a press release from the American Society of Human Genetics, researchers are currently investigating the discrepancy, but hypothesize that there may be a sex-specific protein that interacts with KLF14 and diminishes its impact on men.

While the findings are surprising, Peter LePort, MD, medical director of the Memorial Care Center for Obesity at California's Orange Coast Memorial Medical Care Center, tells Yahoo Health that he isn't shocked.

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"We have observed that, with the pear-shaped body, there is less risk of diabetes," he says, adding that pear-shaped women also seem to fare better after having bariatric surgery.

"Pear-shaped patients seem healthier than ones with an apple-shaped body," he says, "but nobody really knew why."

While the link has been established on a genetic level, experts still don't know why this particular gene variation (and corresponding body shape) is linked to a lowered risk of Type 2 diabetes.

LePort says there may be a simple evolutionary explanation — women with pear-shaped bodies were better able to fend off diabetes millions of years ago than those with different body shapes and the gene was passed on — but more research is needed. "There are still a lot of questions around this relationship," LePort says.

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What we do know: Type 2 diabetes is a growing concern for Americans. An estimated one in three people will develop Type 2 diabetes at some point in their life, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

More than one in three American adults have pre-diabetes, the CDC reports, a condition in which a

person has higher-than-normal blood sugar levels. Pre-diabetes develops into Type 2 diabetes within five years in up to 30 percent of people with the condition.

An apple body shape has also been linked to a great risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. Research published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that excess body fat associated with an apple shape is linked to a greater risk of Type 2 diabetes in men and women.

But while women with a pear-shaped body are less likely to develop Type 2 diabetes as a whole, LePort says it's unlikely that body shape trumps other risk factors for developing the disease like excess body fat, inactivity, and family history.

As a result, he says, women should be mindful of the risks, even those who are pear-shaped.

“When people gain weight, they’re more likely to get diabetes — that’s true with people of all shapes,” he says.

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