

# Concerning high rates of metabolic syndrome found in older Irish adults

September 16 2022



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New research from The Irish Longitudinal Study on Aging (TILDA) at Trinity College Dublin shows a high prevalence of metabolic syndrome among adults aged ≥50 years in Ireland. The study is published in the journal *PLOS One*.

Metabolic syndrome is the medical term for a combination of at least three of the following conditions: obesity, high blood sugar levels, [high blood pressure](#), low levels of protective forms of cholesterol and high levels of harmful forms of cholesterol. It is a known risk factor for [heart disease](#), diabetes, cancer and increases risk of all-cause mortality by 60%.

The study found that 40% of the population aged ≥50 years in Ireland meet [diagnostic criteria](#) used to examine the rate of [metabolic syndrome](#). Increasing age, being male, less years spent in formal education, and lower levels of physical activity were all associated with an increased likelihood of metabolic syndrome.

Key findings:

- 40% of Irish adults aged 50 years and over could be classified as having metabolic syndrome
- 3 in 4 were overweight or obese, with more than 1 in 3 being classified as obese
- participants were 71% more likely to have metabolic syndrome if they had low levels of physical activity

Dr. Kevin McCarthy, first author, said, "This study highlights how common metabolic syndrome is among [older adults](#) in Ireland. Apart from the very high levels of obesity what struck me was the strong associations metabolic syndrome had with many of the modifiable risk factors for dementia—obesity, high blood pressure and high blood sugars, which are all part of the diagnostic criteria for metabolic syndrome, but also lower levels of [formal education](#) attained, higher levels of physical inactivity, higher levels of smoking, and levels of antidepressant use that were nearly twice as high as those without metabolic syndrome."

Professor Rose Anne Kenny, Regius Professor at Trinity College Dublin and senior author of the study, said, "This is the first large population-representative study to report the prevalence of metabolic syndrome in older adults in Ireland and highlights what is potentially a very large public health problem given the known strong associations metabolic syndrome has with conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and overall death rates.

"Those who took part in the TILDA health assessment at wave 1 were informed of their BMI and what that related to, in terms of being overweight, obese etc., but despite this, lifestyle behaviors did not change dramatically and the numbers meeting the criteria for metabolic [syndrome](#) increased by 20% among participants four years later. We need novel ways to communicate these important health messages so that they are meaningful to people."

**More information:** Kevin McCarthy et al, An examination of the prevalence of metabolic syndrome in older adults in Ireland: Findings from The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), *PLOS ONE* (2022). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0273948](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0273948)

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

APA citation: Concerning high rates of metabolic syndrome found in older Irish adults (2022, September 16) retrieved 9 December 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-09-high-metabolic-syndrome-older-irish.html>

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