

Study led by Tulane researchers outlines America's losing battle to lose weight

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Carolyn Scofield cscofiel@tulane.edu

Dr. Lu Qi is director of the Tulane University Obesity Research Center and HCA Regents Distinguished Chair and Professor at Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

It comes as no surprise that Americans struggle with weight loss, but a new study led by researchers at Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine reveals the extent to which many people try, and fail, to shed extra pounds.

Dr. Lu Qi, director of the [Tulane University Obesity Research Center](#), is one of the corresponding authors of the study, which found while more adults are trying to lose weight these days, the average body mass index of Americans continues to increase.

The study compared data from more than 48,000 adults surveyed in 1999-2000 and 2015-2016. Researchers found the number of adults who reported they had attempted to lose weight increased from 34% to 42% during the 15-year time period. The study also found adults reduced how much they ate, exercised more, drank more water, added more fruits and vegetables to their diets and cut back on sugar intake, as ways to drop the excess pounds.

Researchers observed the prevalence of obesity among adults increased from 33.7% to 39.6% between 2007-2008 to 2015-2016.

“These findings suggest that although 34-42% of U.S. adults in our study reported weight-loss efforts, many of them might either not actually implement weight-loss strategies or apply a minimal level of effort, which yielded unsatisfactory results,”

says Dr. Qi. “Reduced food consumption is one common strategy to lose weight, but modified diets are difficult to maintain.”

More Americans reported using exercise to lose weight, Qi says, but the researchers found most people didn’t do enough to increase their strength and aerobic capacity.

Researchers say those who at least tried to lose weight might not be the people who truly needed to. The study also found the number of people who were truly overweight or obese but perceived themselves to be “approximately the right weight” increased from 1999-2000 to 2015-2016.

“These findings suggest a need to increase the promotion of effective strategies for weight loss, including caloric reduction and increased physical activity, among all adults attempting to lose weight,” says Qi. “Notably, adherence is the primary factor predictive of a successful response to a weight-loss attempt. Therefore, weight-loss strategies that consider a participant’s preferences and abilities may help them stick with it long term.”

The [study](#) is published in JAMA Network Open.