COVID-19 Lockdown and Weight Changes

It has been speculated that the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders and shutdown of public places may have resulted in weight gain and increased rates of obesity. A recent survey reported that 60% of adults had gained a mean of 5.6 kg in body weight. However, another meta-analysis suggested much smaller gains at about 1.57 kg. The findings are hence quite inconsistent.

This study examined changes in weight and body mass index (BMI) associated with the COVID-19 shutdowns. Researchers used electronic medical records of more than 100,000 adults and compared weight changes during the year after the COVID-19 shutdown (March 2020 to November 2021) and a year before the shutdown (January 2018 to March 2020). They determined mean changes in weight and BMI in adults who had at least 2 BMI measures at ambulatory visits during both periods. Clinically significant weight change was defined as at least a 5% change in weight or a 2-unit change in BMI. Race and ethnicity were also considered as these factors have been associated with both obesity and the incidence of COVID-19.

Findings show that study participants had significant increases in weight during the pre-shutdown year and post-shutdown year, but the difference between the two periods was not significant. The study reports significantly less weight gain in the post-shutdown interval vs the pre-shutdown interval. The percentage of individuals whose weight remained stable decreased by 2% from pre-shutdown to post-shutdown periods, while the percentage who gained or lost 5% weight increased by approximately 0.7%. Changes in weight from the pre-shutdown period to the post-shutdown period did not differ significantly among different subgroups. The same was true for BMI.

Overall, these findings show that changes in weight or BMI seen after the COVID-19 shutdown were not significantly greater than the changes occurring during the pre-shutdown period. These findings can provide some assurance to concerns that the shutdown may have led to weight gain in adults.

Source: JAMA
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