



THE AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF DERMATOLOGISTS

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MEDIA RELEASE

OBESITY EPIDEMIC SPARKS RISE IN SKIN DISEASES

The current obesity epidemic is causing an alarming increase in skin diseases, Australian dermatologists have warned.

Problems vary from the potentially life threatening to cosmetically disfiguring.

"Most experts fail to recognise the huge impact obesity has on skin health," said Brisbane dermatologist, Dr Jim Muir of the Australasian College of Dermatologists. "In some studies, up to three-quarters of overweight people will have some form of skin problem."

"Excess fat plays havoc with hormonal balances, leading to diabetes and increased levels of male hormone," added Dr Muir. "Obese patients are more prone to acne and other signs of hyperandrogenism, such as increased facial hair in females".

Dr Muir said diabetes caused skin problems such as acanthosis nigricans, a disfiguring thickening and darkening of skin in the armpits and groin.

Skin infections with bacteria and fungi were a major hazard and leg ulcers occurred more often and were harder to treat.

"A major concern for dermatologists is problems with leg skin in the overweight," said Dr Muir.

"Obese people are more likely to develop severe eczema, especially if they have associated ulceration. Lymphoedema, which causes enormous swelling of the legs, exacerbates this. Unless recognised and treated early, these problems become intractable and increase weight problems by causing immobility".

Dr Muir said hospitalisation in turn could lead to bed sores, a particular hazard for the overweight.

Increased sweating with resultant body odour was also a common concern.

"People laugh about it, but it is another disincentive to physical activity and contributes to the vicious cycle of inactivity and weight gain," Dr Muir said. "Obesity also means stretch marks are more common and are irreversible. Multiple annoying skin tags often develop in the groin and armpit. And, due to increased heat, moisture and friction, obese patients frequently develop severe inflammation in the groin, armpit and under the breasts called intertrigo, especially in summer".

Dr Muir said dermatologists were concerned that many patients were told they would just have to live with their skin disease unless they lost weight. "Not true - obviously weight loss is important, but the skin problems of the obese can and should be treated. If left untreated, they only get more severe and harder to treat."

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