

# News Highlights

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## **STUDY FINDS HIGH-QUALITY DIET CAN REDUCE INTERNAL BODY FAT**

**HONOLULU** – A long term healthy, high-quality diet can reduce the risk of cardiometabolic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes or stroke according to a new University of Hawai'i Cancer Center Multiethnic Cohort (MEC) study.

A high-quality diet includes a diet high in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and legumes, with lean, low-fat protein sources plus, fat-free or low-fat dairy foods and oils, such as olive oil. An important component of a high-quality diet is limiting sodium (salt) intake, and empty calories from sugar and saturated and trans fat.

"The burden of chronic diseases related to obesity, such as diabetes and breast cancer, is high among many ethnic groups in Hawai'i. Therefore, it is important to study how diet may improve excess body weight and fatty liver. This may allow the development of better prevention strategies," said Gertraud Maskarinec, MD, PhD, first author and UH Cancer Center Cancer Epidemiology Program researcher.

The participants completed food frequency questionnaires from 1993 to 1996 and clinic visits in 2013 to 2016 and underwent whole-body and abdominal scans. Four science-based diet quality scores predicted lower visceral fat, excess body fat within the abdomen and the liver, and fatty liver. Of the 2,000 participants of the Multiethnic Cohort, more than half live in Hawai'i and Los Angeles.

Individuals with the highest diet quality scores were 35 to 59 percent less likely to have high visceral fat and were also 22 to 43 percent less likely to have fatty liver than those with the lowest scores.

"In recent years, the importance of body fat distribution has emerged. Visceral fat appears to be a stronger risk factor for chronic diseases than body fat located directly under the skin. The proportion of visceral fat appears to differ by ethnicity with higher levels among individuals of Japanese and other Asian ancestries than Whites," said Maskarinec. "The new findings suggest that body fat distribution beyond excess body weight is a critical feature to consider when advising individuals about the health effects of their regular diets."

### **Publication**

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The University of Hawai'i Cancer Center through its various activities, cancer trial patients and their guests, and other visitors adds more than \$54 million to the O'ahu economy. It is one of only 69 research institutions designated by the National Cancer

Institute. Affiliated with the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, the Center is dedicated to eliminating cancer through research, education, patient care and community outreach with an emphasis on the unique ethnic, cultural, and environmental characteristics of Hawai'i and the Pacific.

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