

'SA men like their girls big'

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SOUTH African women are full-figured — and their men like it.

Health experts say African men traditionally favour what whites might consider overweight women and associate fat with wealth.

This is said to be one of many reasons for the high number of obese women, compared to men, in this country.

Statistics released this month by the UN's World Health Organisation show that 37.3% of South African women are obese as against 15.7% of men.

"Some African men find obese women more attractive and would like their own wife to be obese, to show that he cares well for her and that she is not sick and [is] able to produce children," said North West University nutrition professor Salome Kruger.

Obese women have a body-mass index greater than 30kg per metre of height squared. Overweight women have an index of between 25 and 29.9.

Research by the Human Sciences

Obesity a badge of wealth and ability to produce babies

Research Council showed that obesity among black women was attributable to the tendency to link wellbeing to weight gain, lack of affordable healthy food and inadequate physical activity in urban areas.

Kruger said data on obesity in the white South African population

was limited but suggested that there were more obese men than women.

Krisela Steyn, of the Chronic Disease Initiative for Africa, said people of African descent frequently grew up in conditions in which food was scarce and therefore believed that whatever food was available should be consumed "and very

large portions seem to be the accepted practice".

Steyn said there was a belief that "large people" did not have HIV/Aids and weight loss was often interpreted as signifying the onset of the disease.

Association for Dietetics in SA spokesman Catherine Pereira said

research showed that women who were nutritionally deprived as children were more likely to be obese as adults. Men with a similar background did not face as great a risk.

● Teenagers who are very overweight might run double the risk of developing colo-rectal cancer when they reach middle age, according to research published on Monday.

Researchers tracked the health of more than 239 000 men who had been conscripted into the Swedish army between the ages of 16 and 20 from 1969 to 1976.

Around 12% of the men were underweight, more than 80% were of normal weight and 5% were moderately overweight. Of the remainder, 1.5% were very overweight — with a BMI of between 27 and nearly 30 — and 1% were obese, with a BMI of more than 30.

The conscripts were regularly checked for colo-rectal cancer for the next 35 years, during which 885 cases — 501 colon cancers and 384 rectal cancers — were detected.

The very overweight as teenagers were twice as likely to develop bowel cancer in middle age. — AFP