

Obese Soldiers Are Too Expensive, Army Study Suggests

Half of all active-duty male army soldiers are overweight, and one in five are obese. Obese soldiers cost the army much more in medical expenses, using nearly double the medical resources compared to those within a healthy weight. Obese soldiers were less likely to be seen medically for multiple trauma, but this may suggest that obese soldiers are not being deployed in combat as often, which is when such a medical emergency would be most likely.

An army doctor, Maj. Brian Shiozawa has been analyzing the height and weight data for 429,793 active male soldiers and cross-referencing those records with the soldiers' medical visits and treatments. Shiozawa recently presented his research at the Obesity Medicine Association's fall summit in Washington, D.C. He found that obese male soldiers sought medical treatment an average of 13 times a year in 2015 while normal-weight soldiers went an average of seven times a year.

"Are we employing them to go to the doctor, or are they fit to fight the nation's wars? At what point do we say to service members, 'You may be costing us more [than you provide to the military?]' Maybe we need a BMI ceiling. We are spending three to four times as much to maintain you than what we get from you." – Dr. Shiozawa

Shiozawa is a resident at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. He says he was inspired to do this research after serving as a battalion surgeon. He also says that his goal is to, "become an expert on Army obesity."

The study reports that 19.7 percent of the nearly 430,000 male

soldiers within the study have a body mass index of more than 30, which qualifies as obese, and just more than half have a BMI of 25 to 30, which is considered overweight. The largest percentage of soldiers found to be obese were between 25 and 34 years old.

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