TTIPS VOL. 25/22 – INSIGHTS
Thick Thighs Save Lives

Before we moved to the Low Country, Donna and I lived near Washington DC. One beautiful spring day we took a day off from work for a self-guided bike tour of the city and stopped at the Capitol building to look around inside. As we were parking our bikes near the building, a Capitol police officer said, "hey you can't park your bikes here, don't you know that Senators and Representatives work in this building?" I replied, "yes officer, we know that, but don't worry, we'll lock the bikes."

INTRODUCTION

Good News, Cyclists: Thick Thighs Do Save Lives, Especially for Women

Research Finds That Higher Muscle and Fat In Women Is Associated With A Lower Risk Of Death From Cardiovascular Disease

By Selene Yeager / Bicycling Magazine
March 25, 2021

- A UCLA study looking at more than 11,400 adults, roughly half men and half women, found that having higher muscle mass was associated with lower death rates from cardiovascular disease in both men and women.
- In women, but *not* men, higher body fat was also associated with lower risk of dying from heart disease.
- Women specifically should prioritize building muscle mass over losing weight to improve their cardiovascular health, according to the study published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association.*

It's more than a catchy T-shirt or a meme of the day: thick thighs really *do* save lives.

A study published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association* that found that men and women who have high levels of muscle mass are less likely to die from heart disease. In addition, women who have higher levels of body fat, regardless of their muscle mass, also had significantly lower death rates from heart disease.

For the study, researchers analyzed data from a national health survey on 11,463 adults over the age of 20 (5,627 women and 5,836 men) collected over a 15-year period. They then divided the men and women into four body-composition groups: low muscle mass and low body fat; low muscle and high fat; high muscle and low fat, and high muscle and high fat. They then calculated heart disease-related death rates for each of these groups.

After crunching the data, the researchers found that the women with high body fat and high muscle mass had a 42 percent lower risk of dying from heart disease than women who had low muscle mass and low body fat. In fact, women with high fat levels regardless of muscle mass had significantly lower heart disease death rates. Having high muscle mass and low body fat did not appear have a significant advantage over having low muscle and low fat.

The story was different for men. Researchers learned that men with high muscle mass and high body fat was somewhat protective, decreasing their risk by 26 percent (compared to men with low muscle and low body fat), but having high muscle mass and low body fat decreased their risk by 60 percent.

The reason behind these findings appears to be based on where the fat is stored. Men store the vast majority of their fat, particularly the deep visceral fat, in their abdominal region, which is known to increase heart disease risk. Women, before menopause, tend to spread their fat out more evenly; about half of it goes to their abdominal area and half goes to their hips and thighs. The fat in a woman's hips and thighs is actually more protective and is associated with healthier lipid and blood sugar levels and lower cardiovascular risk.

"It's well-known that hip and thigh fat is not as dangerous and can be protective with age as compared to the abdominal [fat], especially visceral abdominal fat," says female performance physiologist Stacy Sims, Ph.D., research associate with AUT University in New Zealand.

Heart disease is more common in older adults. And though women's bodies redistribute their fat during the menopausal transition—storing more in the abdominal area, which is associated with a greater risk for cardiovascular disease —the body fat from the hip and thigh that women have appears to provide enough protection to offset the risks that come with additional belly fat.

When a woman's ovaries stop producing estrogen, the body leans on its fat stores for estrogen production. However, the estrogen produced by fat is a weaker, less beneficial form called estrone, so it doesn't provide the same protection from cardiovascular disease. The estrone produced from the hip and thigh fat stores, however, converts to the more protective form of estrogen called estradiol, which provides cardiovascular protection for women pre-menopause.

Past research has also found that people with a larger hip circumference have a lower risk for heart attack and a study from 2020 reported that large thigh circumference may be linked to lower blood pressure and a reduced risk for heart disease in people with obesity.

Okay riders, I hope that helps. Chow down on some of those recipes I sent last week, and….

Make Every Ride Epic,

Darryl