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Obesity Among Older Adults

In most high-income countries today, there are proportionately more obese older adults than ever before, but the pattern varies by age and region.

1. Ages 60–75: Obesity is Quite Common

Across the U.S., Canada, the UK, Europe, Australia, and many other developed nations:

- 35–45% of adults aged 60–74 are classified as obese.
- In some countries (e.g., the U.S.), that number exceeds 40–45%.
- Obesity rates in this age group are as high or higher than in middle-aged adults.

Why this happens:

- These individuals spent adulthood during decades of rising obesity trends (1980s–2020s).
- Age-related loss of muscle and slowed metabolism make weight gain easier.
- Chronic conditions and reduced mobility further contribute.

Conclusion: Among people in their 60s and early 70s, obesity is very common.

2. Ages 75+: Rates Decline — But Not Because People Get Healthier

Obesity prevalence drops after age 75, often to around 20–30% depending on the country. This decrease happens for several reasons:

- Survivorship bias (people with obesity are less likely to reach 80+).
- Illness, frailty, and muscle loss reduce weight.
- Appetite decreases with age.

- Height loss makes BMI inaccurate (BMI can overestimate or underestimate obesity in old age).

Proportionately, there are many obese elderly people, especially between 60 and 75, where obesity is at or near its lifetime peak. After 75, the proportion decreases, but much of the decrease is due to premature death. Obesity between 60 and 75 is a significant cause of premature death. At all ages obesity compromises quality of life, but it has more extreme effects on the elderly.