

AARP

The Takeaway: Underweight Do Worse After Surgery; Supercommittee Folds With No Plan

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BMI & Surgery Risk: You know that saying “You can never be too rich or too thin?” Well, mark this as **one area where being too thin is a liability: Underweight** individuals have a 40 percent higher risk of **dying** in the **first month after surgery** than patients who are overweight, U.S. researchers reported in the *Archives of Surgery*. The researchers looked at data on nearly 190,000 patients who underwent a variety of surgeries between 2005 and 2006. Patients were divided into five groups, based on their body mass index (BMI); those in the lowest group, or quintile, had a BMI under 23.1, while those in the highest had a BMI of 35.3 or higher.

We found patients in the lowest quintile had a 40 percent higher odds of death compared to the mid-range,” said researcher **George Stukenborg**, referring to people in the overweight category with BMIs of 26.3 to 29.7.

Stukenborg said it is not clear why. The study did not track recent weight loss, so it could be that people who weighed less were sicker to begin with.

Overall, 2,245 or 1.7 percent of people in the study died within 30 days of surgery.

See Also: [Calculate Your BMI >>](#)

Meanwhile, researchers from the **University of Kansas Alzheimer’s Disease Center** are reporting this week that **lower weight** in older adults **could be an early sign of [Alzheimer’s](#)**. That’s because weight loss may be one of several bodily changes that occur in Alzheimer’s patients long before memory problems or other symptoms show up. And while being overweight at *middle age* is a risk factor for Alzheimer’s disease, being overweight later in life is associated with a *lower* risk of Alzheimer’s and dementia, researchers believe.

Supercommittee Folds: In news **that may surprise no one**, the congressional panel charged with devising a plan to reduce the nation’s deficit has failed at its task. The so-called supercommittee was unable to get past partisan disagreements over issues such as raising taxes and cutting spending for programs like Social Security and Medicare. The **[AARP Bulletin reports](#)** on what happens next:

The Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction was charged with cutting at least \$1.2 trillion from the deficit over the next 10 years. With no agreement on how to do that, some automatic actions will be triggered to reach the \$1.2 trillion target: Defense spending will be pared almost \$500 billion; an additional \$500 billion would come from **Medicare** and other domestic spending programs; and interest payments on the national debt will go down.

Social Security and Medicaid are exempt from the automatic across-the-board reductions, called a “sequester.” Medicare would face cuts of up to 2 percent, all from spending on health care providers, not benefits. AARP Legislative Policy Director David Certner says other programs for older people, such as [Meals on Wheels](#), would be hurt.

The automatic cuts, however, don’t kick in until 2013—meaning Congress could try to undo them after next year’s election. But getting agreement on undoing the cuts isn’t any easier than finding the other budget deals that have proved elusive, said Michael Tanner, senior fellow at the Cato Institute.

Tuesday Quick Hits:

- The Food and Drug Administration [has approved a new drug](#) for the treatment of age-related **macular degeneration**.
- **Michael Heyman**—the first nonscientist to head the Smithsonian Institution—[has died at 81](#), after a long battle with emphysema.
- A new study finds [many older patients can’t accurately assess](#) their own **memory loss** or cognitive decline.
- Lawmakers [want more scrutiny of how the Social Security Administration oversees benefit checks](#) sent to **disabled adults** and minors, to make sure the money doesn’t fall into the hands of predators.
- And GOP presidential hopeful **Newt Gingrich** yesterday [unveiled more details of his plan](#) for personal Social Security retirement accounts. “I’m not going to go around the country trying to sell it,” Gingrich said of his plan. “I’m going to try to get hundreds of thousands of young people through social media to decide that it’s their program.”