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Is Obese the New "Thick"?

Black Married Momma

The Anti-Statistic

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Too many black women are getting too fat.

Sure, we've had a long love affair with our natural curves. The sway of our backsides, the projection of our hips and the generousness of our thighs are subjects of songs canonized in black culture. Think of "She's a Bad Mama Jama," in which Carl Carlton sang, "she's built/she's stacked/got all the curves that men like." Or consider even Sir Mix-A-Lot's "Baby Got Back," where he unapologetically claimed to like big butts so much that he just could not lie.

We've enjoyed being thick for a long time. We've lapped up the accolades and adoration. We've shown what our mommas gave us with pride. But all that aside, have we consumed too much of the hype? Have we so chewed the fat from the hogs of happiness while feeling like we're the hottest bodies on the block that we've forgotten to check our portions of agreement and bloated esteem?

Ultimately, as much as it pains me to ask, I must: Is obese becoming the new fat?

According to some studies, black people generally have greater muscle density and bone mass than our counterparts of other races. In a book by Theresa Overfield, she writes: "Blacks have more lean body mass than Whites. This greater muscle mass correlates with greater bone mass. Black women have more muscle mass than White women in the upper and lower extremities."

This distinction is why some black women may weigh, say more than 170 pounds, but still are fit, look healthy and fit into a size 8, 10 or 12. This is but one reason why Western and Eurocentric beauty standards, which include [the stick-thin body type with abundant \(and, oftentimes, surgically enhanced breasts\) as the ideal](#), don't apply to us. It just isn't anatomically or physiologically in the cards for most of us, let alone the average white woman.

However, we come from a culture that has historically recognized that our God-given physiques pack more punch than those of other groups. We've associated curves with femininity, sexuality, reproductive and generalized health, and desirability. Some would even say that the stereotypical African-American diet, with its soul food and comfort cuisine, encourages [black women to engorge themselves and become heavier](#). According to the [American Obesity Association](#), "For women, the black (non-Hispanic) population has the highest prevalence of overweight (78 percent) and obesity (50.8 percent)."

The idea of being "thick" has been in circulation in the black community for generations. It's been presented not only as a good thing, but a preferred package. It's a combination of booty, hips and thighs, set off by a comparatively narrow waistline. It's been known to look like a slightly less exaggerated form of [this](#). On the day to day, it may present as [this](#). [Serena Williams](#) has been said to represent the best of thickness and athleticism in one package.

However, many black women, rolls, guts and all, who look like a pack of sardines stuffed into a too-tight tin, are today touting the thick label. Unfortunately, unlike honorary doctorates, no one is giving away honorary thick passes, no matter how much we delude ourselves into thinking we represent the real thing. This past weekend, I'd wager that 80 percent of the black women I saw were obese. Not overweight, not "healthy," not plump and certainly not thick, but straight-up obese.

It was sad. But you better believe their hair was done and their nails were flawless.

With hypertension and diabetes rates being disproportionate among blacks, keeping extra weight at bay is not simply a matter of visuals. It's about vying to live healthier, for a longer period of time. It's about being able to jog or swiftly walk a mile without stopping or getting out of breath. It's about not having to inject ourselves with insulin each day. It's about making choices and changing our lifestyles so our vitals check out on our physicals and increasing the odds of seeing our children reach adulthood, and witnessing the arrival and development of our grandchildren.

There's no time for euphemisms. And for many ladies, that's what the "thick" label has morphed into. Seasoning a pile of dog feces and frying it in a pan doesn't make it pancakes, either.

As a Black Married Momma who works full-time, is in graduate school, teaches on the side and is active in other pursuits, I don't have much time for anything, let alone exercise. But somehow I manage to squeeze in 3-5 workouts a week. It helps that I belong to a gym with on-site childcare and that I have a husband who is immensely supportive in my efforts. But no one said staying healthy as a working mother would be – or should be – the easiest nut to crack. It may require some re-prioritizing, re-thinking and revised lifestyle choices. It may even mean choosing a more sweat-friendly hairstyle.

In exchange, you'll get a healthier body, a more efficient heart rate, a spouse or

significant other who truly appreciates your efforts, and you'll become a better wellness advocate for your children.

This isn't about co-opting someone else's ideal of beauty. It's not about fitting into a single-digit size. The goal isn't to fit into any one-size-fits-all box.

It's about health and esteem. It's even spiritual, as the Almighty instructs us to avoid gluttony and sloth, to recognize and respect that our bodies are our temples and, once married, these sanctuaries are equally the province of our beloved.

BLACK MARRIED MOMMA are musings from **BlackCommentator.com** Columnist K. Danielle Edwards - a Black full-time working mother and wife, with a penchant for prose, a heart for poetry, a love of books and culture, a liking of fashion and style, a knack for news and an obsession with facts - beating the odds, defying the statistics. *Sister Edwards is a Nashville-based writer, poet and communications professional, seeking to make the world a better place, one decision and one action at a time. To her, parenting is a protest against the odds, and marriage is a living mantra for forward movement. Her work has appeared in [BLACK MARRIED MOMMA](#), MotherVerse Literary Journal, ParentingExpress, Mamazine, The Black World Today, [Africana.com](#), The Tennessean and other publications. She is the author of [Stacey Jones: Memoirs of Girl & Woman, Body & Spirit, Life & Death](#) (2005) and is the founder and creative director of [The Pen: An Exercise in the Cathartic Potential of the Creative Act](#), a nonprofit creative writing project designed for incarcerated and disadvantaged populations. [Click here](#) to contact Ms. Edwards.*



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