

## High obesity rates among African Americans may be linked to gene variant

African Americans have the highest rate of [age-adjusted](#) obesity (48 percent) of all ethnic groups, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). (By contrast, the rate for non-Hispanic whites is 34.5 percent.) A recently [discovered](#) genetic variant unique to African Americans may help explain why.

About 1 percent of African Americans, West Africans and others of African ancestry carry a variant of the semaphorin-4D (SEMA4D) gene, which increases their obesity risk.

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To investigate the genomic basis of obesity in continental Africans, [a team led by Charles Rotimi, chief of the National Human Genome Research Institute's metabolic, cardiovascular and inflammatory disease genomics branch] scanned the complete sets of DNA of thousands of individuals, looking for genetic changes linked to obesity. That's where they found the variant, which is absent in both Europeans and Asians.

"By studying people of West Africa, the ancestral home of most African Americans, and replicating our results in a large group of African Americans, we are providing new insights into biological pathways for obesity that have not been previously explored," says Ayo P. Doumatey, a staff scientist in Rotimi's lab and a co-author of the study.

Those with the variant were about six pounds heavier than those who did not have it, according to the study.

**The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post:** [Newfound gene variant in African Americans may help explain high obesity rates](#)