

RELIGIOUS STATES THE FATTEST

(Does Religion Make You Fat?)

The most religious state, Mississippi, is also the most obese. Similarly, the second most religious state, Alabama is the second most obese. In fact, nine out of ten of the most religious states are also the most obese: Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, Tennessee, Louisiana, Arkansas, North Carolina, Oklahoma and Kentucky all fall within the top ten in the religiousness and obesity ratings (see chart at the end of this media release).

Using obesity statistics from the Calorie Lab¹ and religiousness statistics from Gallup polls,² author Tim Covell raises the possibility that religion may be bad for your health in his new book, *Born Atheist*. “The religious promise of a new body after death,” Covell says, “may lead the faithful to neglect their bodies here on earth.”

The link between obesity and religion is undeniable, Covell says, but he acknowledges that whether religion *causes* obesity is an unanswered question. It is also possible that poor health leads to more interest in religion, Covell admits.

In further support of his hypothesis Covell points to a study funded by the pro-religious Templeton Foundation.³ That study hoped to find that prayer helped heart surgery patients heal. It divided them into three groups, one that did not receive prayer, one that did but did not know it, and finally, one that received prayer and knew it. The only group with significantly poorer health outcomes was the group that received prayer and knew it. “That group,” Covell says, “thought God would take care of things for them and therefore took poorer care of their health.”

In a country where 80% of the people are religious, Covell says, the general assumption is that religion is at worst harmless and at best beneficial. But, Covell says, his analysis opens the door to another possibility, that religion is bad for your health.

(more)

¹ (Calorie Lab produces the ratings using a three year average of statistics from the U.S. Center for Disease Control) “Mississippi is the fattest state for 5th straight year, Colorado still leanest,” Calorie Lab, June 28, 2010, <http://calorielab.com/news/2010/06/28/fattest-states-2010/>

² “State of the States: Importance of Religion,” Gallup Polls, January 28, 2009, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/114022/State-States-Importance-Religion.aspx#2>

³ Benson, Herbert, M.D., et al. “Study of the Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer (STEP) in Cardiac Bypass Patients: A Multi-Center Randomized Trial of Uncertainty and Certainty of Receiving Intercessory Prayer,” The John Templeton Foundation, May 5, 2005 http://www.templeton.org/pdfs/press_releases/060407STEP_paper.pdf

Nine out of ten states are in the top ten of both religiousness and obesity rankings:

State	Religion Ranking	Obesity Ranking
Mississippi	1	1
Alabama	2	2
South Carolina	3	9
Tennessee	4	3
Louisiana	5	5
Arkansas	6	8
North Carolina	8	10
Oklahoma	9	6
Kentucky	10	7

Only two States are not in the top 10 of both religiousness and obesity rankings:

State	Religion Ranking	Obesity Ranking
Georgia	7	14
West Virginia	12	4

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