NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Preliminary results from the nation’s largest cancer prevention survey suggest that obesity may promote cancer, the chairman of the Louisiana division of the study said.

Pelayo Correa, pathology professor at the LSU Medical School in New Orleans said that, although the American Cancer Society’s Cancer Prevention Study is not yet complete, the initial data indicate that in populations of adults more than 40 percent overweight the death rate from cancer is markedly higher.

“There is a general correlation with obesity,” he said, stressing that the findings are not finalized. “On a specific basis, obesity has been linked to cancer of the uterus.”

More disturbing, Correa said, is the ineffectiveness of anti-smoking campaigns with women.

“There is a definite trend of quitting smoking among men, but younger women are taking it up more,” he said. “I think there is a need for more action on smoking, especially among women.”

Other results show that participants who exercised more had a lower death rate from cancer.

Specific findings for the nearly 2,000 participants in northwestern Louisiana and 12,000 statewide will not be available until the study is complete, said Helen Shatford, director of the American Cancer Society of Northwest Louisiana.

For six years, the society has followed 1.2 million men and women over 40 who volunteered to fill out questionnaires about their lifestyles, eating habits, occupations and family disease histories.

This week marked the end of their participation in the study.

Louisiana ranks among the top states in the nation for deaths from lung cancer, and the cancer society predicts 2,800 will die from the disease this year in Louisiana.

Shatford said she believes the state’s high cancer rate is both a result of living habits — too many cigarettes, too much alcohol and spicy food — as well as exposure to environmental hazards such as petrochemical plants and hazardous waste.

“You can’t really put the blame more on one than the other,” she said.