
The Epidemic of Obesity: How to Stop It

Obesity has been a major epidemic in America for a long time. It is one of the biggest health concerns among every age group. Obesity is caused by accumulation of extra fat, specially the buildup adipose tissue underneath the skin and fat around the organs of the body, which results in negative effects of the body and the mind. Across the country, more than one in three adults and one in six children (age 2-19) are obese (the state of obesity). Obesity is largely caused by eating behaviors and lifestyle, but there are also factors associated with it, such as genetics, junk foods, insulin, medical condition, leptin resistance, food availability, and lack of physical activities. Obesity caused by these various reasons can lead to serious conditions. Some of these serious conditions are high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, sleep apnea and cancer. This condition can also lead to psychological conditions. Obesity is caused by poor eating choices, lack of physical activity, and socioeconomic factors that can lead to serious physical and mental conditions.

The number one cause of obesity is poor eating habits. Most Americans regularly eat away from home and particularly in fast food restaurants. People choose fast food restaurants because it is convenient and less expensive. Research shows eating fast food three times a week can increase the risk of obesity by 33 percent (Rogers). Fast foods contain excessive number of calories that exceeds your daily intake of recommended calories, they also serve you food that is high in cholesterol, sodium, and sugar. Too much cholesterol and sodium in your diet can lead to heart diseases and excessive intake of sugar can lead to diabetes. Americans eat less than the recommended amounts of vegetables, fruits, whole-grains, dairy products, and oils (USDA), and mostly intake empty calories which have no nutrition. Eating excessive amounts of food and snacking throughout the day and not burning those extra calories are also major problems among people suffering from obesity. Drinking alcohol and sugar containing drinks are also adding to this epidemic. The most popular example is Starbucks, they make their drinks exceptionally appealing which is filled with sugar contents. This can lead to obesity and type II diabetes.

Media also contributes to promoting obesity. Media often shows advertisements for fast food restaurants, making it enticing for children. They use characters and popular figures to lure children and parents into buying unhealthy options. American youth spend most of their time on television or on some type of media; therefore, they are bound to encounter temptations. They are also influenced by their peers on what to eat. Most commercials aimed at children are unhealthy, high fat, high sugar or high salt food with little nutritional value. Media endorses unhealthy choices and bribes them with a toy, which makes children more of an easier target. One needs to make better food choices, eat nutritional food, and consume less number of calories to fight against obesity.

The second cause that follows this problem is lack of physical activity in many Americans. Obesity and lack of exercise often goes hand in hand. It is in part because of energy imbalance, consuming too many calories and not burning those calories, the extra calories turn into fat. The more weight a person gains, the harder it gets for them to move around and do any physical activity; Consequently, it raises the risk of increased cholesterol, heart diseases, cancers of breast and prostate, stroke, and type 2 diabetes. More than 112,000 Americans die

unnecessarily each year from preventable diseases directly related to obesity (Davis). Keeping active can solve problems associated with gaining weight. The most common reason people don't get enough exercise because they do not have enough time. Americans work long hours and take short vacations. Many are overwhelmed with family obligations. They also don't get enough breaks at work to do light exercises. Some people lack self-motivation or get bored with exercises. Eating better food and doing physical activity per day can reduce the effects of obesity.

Lastly, there are also many psychological and social factors that contribute to obesity. Many people respond to unwarranted eating when going through emotional struggles. People experiencing depression are more likely to overeat and make poor food choices, and avoid exercising, they also tend to eat in an attempt to self-medicate (Depression and Obesity). They eat in large amounts to cope with stress, sad, anger, or boredom. Socioeconomic position is also related to obesity. Many Americans live in poverty and can't afford healthy meals for their family. They work 2-3 jobs, as a result, they can't cook food at home. Some children are growing up on just fast food restaurants because it's a less expensive option for families with low income. High calorie processed food typically cost less than healthier foods. Some live in a neighborhood where there are not enough stores that provide fresh produce and healthy choices. Children living in low-income neighborhoods are 20 percent to 60 percent more likely to be obese or overweight than children living in high socioeconomic status neighborhoods and healthier built environments (Socioeconomics and Obesity).

Obesity affects the physical body immensely. It leads to a number of problems and diseases in various age group. Obesity is chronic disease similar to hypertension and atherosclerosis. The main cause of obesity is storage of fat in the cells and around the organs. This additional amount fat, then expands or increases in number. It is this hyperplasia and hypertrophy of fat cells that is the pathological lesion of obesity. Enlarged fat cells produce the clinical problems associated with obesity either because of the weight or mass of the extra fat or because of the increased secretion of free fatty acids and numerous peptides from enlarged fat cells. The consequence of these two mechanisms is other diseases, such as diabetes mellitus, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, heart disease, and some forms of cancer (A.George). Sleep apnea is also a serious sleep disorder connected to weight gain. Increased neck circumference and fat deposits in overweight people lead to obstructive sleep apnea (A,George). In this condition, one can suddenly stop breathing while sleeping. Osteoarthritis can also be caused by accumulation of fat in the areas of knees and ankles.

Diabetes is also one of the main disease caused by obesity. Insulin secretion and insulin resistance occur from excess weight. Overweight and hypertension interact with cardiac function, overweight individuals have eccentric dilation of the ventricular walls of the heart, which can lead to stroke. Certain forms of cancer have also increased in overweight people, this is in turn to eating excessive amount of processed food and not in taking enough nutrition. There are also changes in the reproductive system because the fat stored in the reproductive organs. Obesity also affects one's sexual life, and can strain personal relationships. Obesity can also lead to serious mental health issues. It is frequently accompanied by depression. People with obesity often feel bad about their bodies, they lose their self-confidence. In today's social media world, body shaming has led to people feeling unhappy about themselves. Everyone wants to see a perfect body figure and so called size zero, so when that expectation is not met, people with obesity often becomes mockery which leads to emotional problems.

To stop this epidemic of obesity, changes in diet can increase one's life expectancy. The reliance on eating fast foods can decrease the scope of various diseases. Eating nutritional and healthy food which includes preparing your food, eating adequate amount of vegetables and fruits. Growing one's fruits and vegetables can also create a healthy environment. Making little changes in the diet can lead to a healthy individual. Education in school and at home can stop children from making unhealthy food choices. Parents should discuss the benefits of eating healthy and should encourage children to eat nutritious food. Government should make strict policy regarding marketing fast foods on tv and any other media. They should provide healthy meals to people that can't afford it and give education on eating healthy and regularly exercising in the neighborhood with poverty. Making physical activity an important part of your routine is the only way to combat obesity. Making health care affordable to people suffering from obesity, which will help them with physical and mental illnesses. To fight against obesity, government, food industry, and school must work together to spread nutrition and physical education. Poor eating habits, lack of physical activity, and psychological factors are all connected, if we make bad eating choices we will be less motivated to workout. Working out releases endorphins which make us happier and more relaxed, without endorphins people can fall into depression and other psychosocial diseases. It becomes difficult to change in this state.

One solution I believe can greatly effect positive change is to include cooking classes as part of general education. Our relationship to food and food preparation has been on a decline ever since the industrial revolution. Creating courses around preparation of healthy multinational cuisine we could introduce a new generation to conscious cooking. Reintroducing that relationship with food preparation back into our culture is one way we can combat obesity.

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