

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Week of May 21, 2012- Health and Obesity in America

A recent national news story took center stage last week when it was declared that today's youth will be the first generation in the United States that will have a shorter life expectancy than that of its parents. Up until now, each generation of Americans have enjoyed a healthier and longer life than the previous generation. What is causing this paradigm shift? According to many health organizations, including the Centers for Disease Control, obesity is the reason.

Today, one-third of Americans are obese; another third are overweight. Some 26 million Americans have Type 2 diabetes. An additional 79 million more are pre-diabetic. Is it any wonder why our youth will be the first generation of Americans to die at younger ages than their parents? Here's a few startling facts:

- Obese youth are more likely to have risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as high cholesterol or high blood pressure. In a population-based sample of 5- to 17-year-olds, 70% of obese youth had at least one risk factor for cardiovascular disease.
- Obese adolescents are more likely to have pre-diabetes, a condition in which blood glucose levels indicate a high risk for development of diabetes.
- Children and adolescents who are obese are at greater risk for bone and joint problems, sleep apnea, and social and psychological problems such as stigmatization and poor self-esteem.

Children and adolescents who are obese are likely to be obese as adults and are therefore more at risk for adult health problems such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, several types of cancer, and osteoarthritis. One study showed that children who became obese as early as age 2 were more likely to be obese as adults; therefore placing them at greater risk to have life-threatening health problems as adults. Overweight and obesity are associated with increased risk for many types of cancer, including cancer of the breast, colon, endometrium (inner layer of the uterus), esophagus, kidney, pancreas, gall bladder, thyroid, ovary, cervix, and prostate, as well as multiple myeloma and Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Overweight and obesity are both labels for ranges of weight that are greater than what is generally considered healthy for a given height. The terms also identify ranges of weight that have been shown to increase the likelihood of certain diseases and other health problems.

For adults, overweight and obesity ranges are determined by using weight and height to calculate a number called the "body mass index" (BMI). BMI is used because, for most people, it correlates with their amount of body fat.

- An adult who has a BMI between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight.
- An adult who has a BMI of 30 or higher is considered obese.

BMI is calculated by dividing the subject's mass by the square of his or her height, typically expressed either in metric or US "customary" units. It is important to remember that although BMI correlates with the amount of body fat, BMI does not directly measure body fat. As a result, some people, such as athletes, may have a BMI that identifies them as overweight even though they do not have excess body fat. Other methods of estimating body fat and body fat distribution include measurements of skin-fold

thickness and waist circumference, calculation of waist-to-hip circumference ratios, and techniques such as ultrasound, computed tomography, and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s our lifestyles have significantly changed through more sedentary practices, contributing to weight gain, as more Americans work at desk jobs, use electronic devices and get served increasingly larger portions at restaurants. More than 50 percent of the food dollar is spent outside the home as people are eating outside due to being on the move or having crowded schedules. Also, we want to take our families out for a treat — and there are so many restaurants out there now to cater to this need. ... The problem is when you go out, you tend to eat more and you tend to eat worse than when you eat at home.

By the end of the day, almost one quarter of the U.S. population will have eaten fast food. Though it has been difficult to empirically establish a causal link between fast food and obesity, fast food remains a focal topic in the obesity discussion. Given that the rates of obesity among American children and the number of fast food restaurants have both doubled since the late 1970s, it's easy to see why fast food is such an easy target. In addition to fast foods, Americans eat 31% more packaged food than fresh food, and consume more packaged food than their counterparts in nearly all other countries.

Another cause for concern is that America's chronic obesity epidemic has triggered a crisis in organ donations - because a quarter of prospective donors are physically unfit due to obesity to undergo the procedure.

Even though people who are overweight or obese eat more, they can still suffer from malnutrition. Diets high in starches, saturated fats and salt provide empty calories and can cause water retention and other health problems.

While we have heard the concerns raised by the medical community about the need to change our eating habits and to be more physically active, it seems like our direction towards improving our lifestyle remains the same and now is being magnified in the next generation – our children. Nevertheless, health experts insist that we can take charge over our lives and work towards improving our well-being. Here are just a few simple, effective and quite feasible things we can do. ***Our lives and the lives of the next generation of Americans depend on it.***

- Learn how to cook fresh foods. Find sources of healthful foods, and find out how to prepare them. Read labels, and follow portion sizes.
- If you must buy food in a convenience store or fast food restaurant, seek the healthiest choices. At the store, look for yogurt, fresh fruit or fruit in single serving cups (without corn syrup), low-fat milk, nuts, low-sugar high-fiber cereals, canned fish like tuna, and cheese slices (part-skim milk). Avoid items with trans-fats, corn syrup or lots of sodium (salt) or nitrites. Don't buy packaged cupcakes, cookies, chips, candies, processed meats and fried pies.
- For fast food, choose small side salads with low-fat dressing, baked potatoes (without extras like sour cream, bacon or cheese), and yogurt with fresh fruit. Drink water, not sodas. Avoid fried foods – good bye french fries!
- Be creative if your neighborhood lacks stores with a wide variety of affordable fresh fruits, vegetables, meats and dairy. Suggest that your corner market carry a few more fresh items like bananas, apples, pears and tomatoes, and buy them when available. Start a vegetable garden with your school or church. Encourage a mobile or permanent farmers market. Arrange rides and drivers for people without transportation.
- Seek fresh and high-fiber foods.
- Think about your family members and how your purchasing, cooking and eating habits affect their long-term health.

**Never be afraid to try something new. Remember, amateurs built the ark.
Professionals built the Titanic -Unknown**