

Of Interest

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“It was Never About One Piece of Cake”... America’s Obesity Epidemic

by Liz Ashe

I used to think that weight “before and after loss” pictures were fabricated because the individuals never looked the same and they were photographed from different angles. That was until I met a man who lost 300 pounds and a woman who lost 250 pounds. Both people showed me before and after pictures. I really expected to see some resemblance in their faces but surprisingly that wasn’t the case. No amount of creative imagining worked. The people looked totally and completely different; not only their bodies, but also their faces. And they weren’t standing in different positions or angles.

The man, who brings a cooler of his special food everywhere, was very open about his eating addiction. He said, “*It was never about one piece of cake or one sandwich. It was about eating the whole cake and five bologna sandwiches.*” I told him that I didn’t understand since I get full at a certain point and can’t fathom eating another bite. He said, “*If you sit there long enough, you can eat anything.*” He went on to explain that he was not a binge eater (eating a great amount in one sitting), he was what he called a “Grazer” meaning he ate all the time, not because he was hungry, but because he wanted to eat. He said he was never without something to eat. After supper, he surrounded himself with food and snacks and then sat in front of the television for hours, eating all the while.

The woman told me that she had struggled with being over-weight all her life and that her parent’s had similar issues. She didn’t believe it was as much a genetic predisposition as a “life style eating habit.” Approximately 25 to 30 percent of adult obesity cases begin with being overweight during childhood. Coming from a poor family, she filled up on potatoes, rice, pasta and other carbohydrate rich foods. The trouble with carbohydrates is that they digest quickly giving a burst of energy followed in a short time by extreme hunger. Meat (protein), which her family could afford only rarely, takes longer to digest delaying the “I’m hungry message.”

Both of these people told me that even faced with some serious health issues, it took a long time for them to decide to lose the weight. For them keeping the weight off is a constant struggle.

They are not alone. According to E. Chester Ridgway, M.D., President, The Endocrine Society, “Obesity in America has reached epidemic proportions.”

In 2004, the U.S. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) ranked obesity as the number one health threat facing America and it hasn’t waned. Obesity isn’t prevalent in just adults. The steadily increasing incidence of overweight children and adolescents raises concern as more than 15 percent of the population under 18 years old is classified as overweight.

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THE ENERGY EQUATION

Whether you want to lose weight or maintain a healthy weight, it’s important to understand you cannot take in more calories (through foods and beverages) than your body uses (through normal body functions, daily activities, and physical activity).

COMPLICATIONS OF OBESITY

Overweight and obese people are at an increased risk for developing the following conditions:

Type 2 (non-insulin dependent) Diabetes

Cardiovascular Disease and Stroke

High Blood Pressure

High Cholesterol and Lipid Levels

Gall Stones, Kidney Stones

Osteoarthritis

Gout

Fatty Liver Disease

Sleep Apnea

Respiratory Problems

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome

Fertility Complications

Pregnancy Complications

Psychological Disorders, Depression

Cancer of Various Organs

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How is Obesity Measured?

Endocrinologists and other healthcare professionals measure obesity using two primary tools:

1. Body mass index or BMI, which measures weight in proportion to height; and
2. Waist circumference which measures abdominal fat. Women with a waist (measurement taken at thinnest point) greater than 35 inches and Men (measurement through belly button) with waist greater than 40 inches are considered overweight.

BMI: According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), overweight refers to those with a BMI greater than 25. This may be the result of increases in body fat and or lean muscle. Obese refers to any individual with a BMI greater than 30.

What causes obesity and weight gain?

Eating more calories than the body needs and can burn. One pound of fat is equal to 3,500 calories. Keep in mind that obesity can be caused by a number of different factors including lack of exercise, over-eating, genetics, hormonal disorders, environmental and cultural issues.

What can you do?

The most important thing you can do to combat obesity is to prevent it before it develops. Parents should educate their children and encourage good eating and exercise habits. For those who need to treat obesity or who are overweight, there are many options available. Discuss them with your physician. Weight management begins with eating fewer calories and a regular exercise program, but some individuals may need prescriptions drugs or other treatment options.

Words to the Wise....

- Increase activity. Limit the amount of time sitting in front of the TV or computer. Plan activities for the whole family that include walking, hiking, biking, sports, swimming. Park away from the store or workplace, take stairs instead of elevator, take short walks every day or start an organized exercise routine.
- Decrease the amount of food you eat. Cut your calories by a few hundred a day.
- Limit your portions. At restaurants eat half of your meal, take the other half home. Don't eat the whole basket of rolls or bread.
- Plan low fat, low caloric meals and shop accordingly. Don't shop when hungry.
- Keep healthy snacks on hand and ready to eat. Good options include fresh vegetables, frozen or canned fruits, low-fat cheese, low-fat yogurt, fig bars, graham crackers, low-fat, sugar-free desert pops, sugar-free Jell-O, or gingersnaps.
- Eat meals at the table and eat slowly. Stop eating when you feel full.
- Portion out snacks in baggies rather than sit down with the whole box.
- Avoid fad diets. They don't work. Talk to a nutritionist, or look into healthy weight loss programs.
- Consult your physician for your options or other suggestions.

Resources

Center for Disease Control
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity

The Hormone Foundation
www.hormone.org/learn/obesity

National Institute of Health
www.nih.gov

America Obesity Association
www.obesity.org

Overeaters Anonymous
www.oa.org

US Food and Drug Administration
www.fda.gov

Wellness Councils of America
www.welcoa.org

Calculating Your BMI

BMI = weight in pounds divided by your height in inches squared x 703.

Example: 159 pounds divided by 4356 (66"x 66") = .036 x 703 = BMI 25.66

For an automatic calculator go to cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi or just Google body mass index.

EAP CAN HELP

CALL your EAP 1-800-769-9819 for other ideas. Definitely call if your weight situation causes you to feel unhappy, depressed or discouraged. Call if you are concerned about someone else's weight problems.

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