

Obesity

Obesity is a growing epidemic in the United States that affects not only adults, but also the youth. In an attempt to promote healthy eating habits and reduce the population of overweight adolescents, schools have been offering nutritious lunches as well as emphasizing the importance of physical activity. The terms obesity and overweight have different implications. Obesity is defined as having an excess of total body fat. On the other hand, being overweight means weighing too much which could result from muscle, bone, fat and/or body water. Both terms essentially mean the person is above his or her normal body weight range. Body mass index or BMI, which assesses height and weight, is used to determine whether or not a person is overweight. A person is considered overweight if his or her BMI is between 25 and 29.9 while an individual with a BMI over 30 is considered obese. Overweight and obesity result from an energy imbalance which involves eating more calories than your body utilizes. Thus, the excess calories are converted to fat. Lack of physical activity also contributes to excess body fat. Exercise increases your body's metabolism which helps your body burn more calories and reduce body fat. There are many factors that play a role in obesity such as age, gender, genetics, environmental factors, psychological factors, illness and certain medications. Being obese increases your risk for conditions such as coronary heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, some cancers, stroke and other serious health problems. Weight loss of as little as 5% of one's body weight can lower the risks of these diseases. Increasing physical activity and decreasing calorie intake through a nutritiously balanced diet can greatly reduce one's risk of becoming overweight or obese as well as strengthen one's overall health. The government is even taking steps to promote better eating habits by increasing the tax on unhealthy food products, such as soda, which is filled with excess sugar and empty calories. Prevention is the key to a healthy mind and body. Minor changes such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator or drinking water instead of soft drinks can significantly and positively improve one's wellbeing. Obesity is a growing problem that can be controlled if people make the necessary changes in their diet and incorporate more physical activities in their daily routine.