

Eating and hunger



Introduction In the recent times, obesity has increasingly become a social problem which has crossed the realm of personal issues that can be resolved individually. In US, in the last three decades, the adult obese population has doubled and obesity in children and adolescent has nearly tripled (HHS News, 2001, ref. 1). This trend has caused concern amongst the medical fraternity and measures are needed to arrest this rapidly growing tendency amongst the population, especially children. The wide ranging implications of obesity are serious and they need to be addressed at the earliest to promote better health and welfare of the society at large.

Meaning and cause of obesity

Obesity and overweight can be generally defined as the state when the body mass index increases disproportionately vis-à-vis standard set by the medical authority. ' An overweight adult is defined as one with a BMI between 25 and 29. 9, while an obese adult has a BMI of 30 or higher. In children and adolescents, overweight is defined as a sex-and-age specific BMI at or above the 95th percentile, based on revised growth charts by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention' (HHS News, 2001, ref. 2).

Bad eating habits and erratic eating schedules are key proponents of obesity. The increasing trend of eating fast food and aerated drinks are the major reasons for overweight as they are high on calories and low on nourishment. Genetics and to some extent obese behavior can also be contributed to the socio-psychological paradigms of the communities at large. Researcher Smith says that fat intake of children in US has ' inadequate amounts of fresh fruits, vegetables, and complex carbohydrates, but excessive amounts of fats'(Smith, 1999, p. 84). Another very interesting observation is made by Birch et al. who say that some teachers also promote

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unhealthy food by using it to reward students for desired classroom behavior and ‘ this practice leads children to attach great value to such treats’ (Birch et al., 1995).

Problems associated with obesity

The alarming rise in obesity and overweight has become a serious problem because it promotes serious health hazards in the form of diseases, especially silent diseases like blood pressure, which may also prove fatal and cause death. It is common knowledge that diseases like heart problems, diabetes, are the by products of obesity which, if not diagnosed early and treated, may lead to death. Obese people are also prone to socio-psychological problems like depression which has now become a key issue and needs urgent attention.

Overweight and obese children often become the target of ridicule in the school that leads to low self esteem, adversely impacting their personality. Another serious repercussion of obesity and overweight is the financial losses in the form of recurring expenses for the treatment of diseases that become part and parcel of an obese person.

Proposed solution

School cafeteria and fast food joints near the schools must promote healthy eating and desist from selling items that are hazardous to the health of the children. Children, irrespective of the state of their health, must be motivated to participate in outdoor activities and take active interest in sports that involves lots of physical activities. Last but not the least important that children and adolescents are periodically exposed to in house counseling by the school or the health authorities regarding advantages of good food habits and healthy disposition.

Reference

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