

# Mapping the issue

[Business](#), [Industries](#)



Tammy Lin ENGL 1302 051 Brittain 5/11/12 Trimming the Fat of a Growing Problem Obesity is becoming a major problem to many Americans as well as many people around the world. Being the second cause of preventable death in the United States, obesity increases the risk of numerous adverse health problems including breast cancer, heart disease, type II diabetes, osteoarthritis, colon cancer, stroke, and more. Obesity is defined as an excess proportion of total body fat, with a person being considered obese if his or her weight is twenty percent or more above normal body weight.

A common way to measure obesity is by calculating the body mass index. An individual is considered overweight if his or her BMI is between twenty five and thirty, while a person is seen as obese if his or her BMI is over thirty. With that said, it has been estimated that sixty million Americans twenty years and older are obese, which makes up thirty percent of the adult population; meanwhile, nine million children and teenagers ages six to nineteen are overweight. The number of overweight and obese Americans has increased since 1960, a trend that shows no sign of slowing down.

In this paper I will review three main positions regarding the issue of ways to approach the multiplying rate of obesity. First, there are those who advocate for the implementation of fat taxes. With the administration of taxes on unhealthy foods and drinks, this group believes that it will significantly discourage the consumption of such foods and will, in turn, promote healthy and responsible eating. Second, there are those who remain persistent in maintaining the privacy of one's decision making concerning food intake.

With the expansion of diverse kinds of food production, this group considers an individual's food preference as unique, exclusive, and personal. Third, there are those who believe that lowering the costs of healthy foods will encourage the purchase of nourishing and health-benefiting foods. They embrace the belief that most people would eat healthier if the food was more affordable. The first position is the support of fat taxes. The people who stand in this position are those who are concerned with America's public health issue today, especially the issues centering on obesity. Lisa Baertlin recently published an article on Reuters, an international news agency headquartered in the UK, entitled "Battle Lines Drawn over Soda, Junk Food Taxes" in response to the the wide-growing obesity epidemic today, with the proposition that fat taxes could help save individuals their health and money. She claims that taxes could help make up for the at least one hundred and forty seven billion dollars spent on treating diseases related to obesity and fund programs that battle for this issue. According to U. S. lawmakers, soda tax is one of the most probable sources that would most likely be used to tackle healthcare reform.

In relativity to the taxing of cigarettes, these people believe that by taxing soda, it would also similarly reduce consumption and its revenue stream; by taxing more than ten percent for beverages, purchases would be cut down by eight to ten percent. According to a recent Thomson Reuters survey included within Baertlin's article, "about fifty-eight percent of Americans are willing to bear a tax increase of one percent or more to support healthcare reform" (Baertlin 1), which proves that more than half of American citizens are willing to take a step forward for the promotion of a healthy nation.

Writers like Baertlin sympathize with those who are in the center of the public health crisis today, specifically “ overweight adolescents who are starting to suffer problems that used to plague middle-aged adults” (1). Baertlin herself is in favor of administering fat taxes and is certain that levies on fattening foods are an essential factor of any anti-obesity endeavor. The food industry plays a large part in the causes of obesity. Most food companies are culpable of falseadvertising, which swallows consumers into their too-good-to-be-true trends.

Journalist Karlee Weinmann contributed a piece to Business Insider concerning food companies’ false advertisement. In the article “ 14 False Advertising Scandals That Cost Brands Millions”, Weinmann states that for companies that cross the line to making false claims, it can cost millions of dollars, while also having to face public negativity. However, even with all this said, will companies modify their marketing policies for the greater good, or will they uphold their profits as far more important than a consumer’s right to know the truth?

More than likely, most brands will continue to false advertise their products, which is why these people in this group believe that fat taxes are efficient in lowering consumption of soda and other health-stripping foods. According to Weinmann, “ there’s a big difference between pushing the truth and making false claims. Is a product really ‘ scientifically proven’, and are ‘ results guaranteed’? ” (Weinmann 1). Food brands such as Activia yogurt, Splenda, Kashi, and Eclipse gum have been caught with such false advertisement scandals; the more unhealthy the food really is, the more beneficial its company would make it seem.

Writers like Weinmann identify with those who have been misled by deceitful food claims made by the companies they trusted. Therefore, supporters of fat taxes are certain that the implementation of fat taxes would solve these complications by creating more awareness and heedfulness when consumers purchase junk foods. The second position is the promotion of health education and that one's food choice should not be hindered or influenced to reduce obesity. The people who stand in this position believe that an individual should have choices in the items he or she buy, and be guilt-free.

In the article "Childhood Obesity: A Global Public Health Issue" published in *International Journal of Preventive Medicine*", writer Amar Kanekar states that the main cause of childhood obesity in today's public health crisis in both developed and underdeveloped countries is because of the disproportion between the child's caloric intake and the calories effectively used for growth/development and physical activities. To these people, what we eat is not the sole reason of the cause of obesity; genetic, behavioral, and environmental are all constituents of childhood obesity.

Moreover, many health-related risks are present when a child is obese; negative body-image and low self-esteem inevitably result in psychological and social issues. Cardiovascular disease, increased cholesterol levels, and high blood pressure are all possible potential health risks involved and that there is, indeed, "preventive programs that help regulate obesity by educating individuals about healthy nutrition and diseases" (Kanekar 2). According to a report presented from National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, in the years of 2007-2008, there was an estimation that

“ 16. % of children and adolescent in the age group of 2-19 years were obese...The data collected for the same period shows that the adolescent (age group 12-19 years) obesity has increased from 5. 0 to 18. 1%” (2). By letting people know about health hazards and the importance of physical exercise, the chance of obesity could greatly decrease. Those who are pro-food-choice would side with Kanekar in that they believe there should not be any direct government intervention with food costs, but that there should be a public informing of the effects commonly eaten unhealthy foods would result in.

Kanekar, Baertlin, and Weinmann all believe that the prevalence of obesity seen in children and adults is increasing and that some form of action must be done. While these writers see and support the benefits of the reduction of junk food intake, Kanekar is more focused on declaring health education, with the hope of lowering BMI and the rate of weight gain. All three authors recognize the importance of lowering consumption of fatty foods, but the position here does not endorse the advocating of fat taxes. The third position is lowering the costs of healthy foods.

The people who stand in this position believe that by decreasing the costs of healthful foods sold, there would be a habit shift in the people's purchases of fatty foods to foods that are much more nutritional. Journalist Katherine Bauer published an article entitled “ Price and Availability Matter” in Room for Debate, a running commentary by outside contributors from The New York Times, where she states the “ lack of access to high quality, reasonably priced fruits and vegetables and other healthful foods has been associated with poorer diets and, in many cases, higher risk for obesity.

This is especially true among lower-income individuals whose purchasing habits are more sensitive to the cost of food” (Bauer 1). There is strong evidence that shows a clear impact between change in food access and the pricing on one’s purchasing habits. For example, there are programs that decrease the cost of healthier foods, which resulted in the increased purchasing of the healthier foods. Cheaper prices on healthy foods reduce one’s weight, even if the cost of junk foods remains the same price. A news report conducted from the USDA observed the BMI of children and how it changed in correlation to food prices.

It was shown that “ if the price of 100% juice decreases 10%, BMIs decreased . 3%. The same process works for lowfat milk (. 35% decrease) and dark, leafy vegetables (. 28% decrease)” (2). Moreover, Bauer identifies with those who receive low-income and struggle with the purchase of healthy foods, and also with those who believe that it is not only the wealthy that ‘ deserve’ the most benefits from the healthy aisles in the food market. Bauer’s views is relatively similar with Baertlin, Weinmann, and Kanekar, in that public attitudes towards obesity and obesity policy should be given much more attention than it is now, but Bauer herself has a different approach in this matter, especially from Kanekar. She believes that health education may not be sufficient enough to cause a significant awareness in individuals that junk foods should no longer be habitually purchased. Instead, she considers the perspective that by lowering healthy foods, there would be an effective overall change in the nation’s weight and BMI and that the idea would more readily fit within one’s budget.

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