

Formula for an 'Obesogenic' American Society

If it ever seemed like a joke, it isn't any longer: America is a society of couch potatoes.

Lifestyle. Urban decentralization. The e-Age. Fast food supersizing. More than at any other time in our history, U.S. society is seeing the imminent impact of physical inactivity and poor diet.

The discussion is no longer merely casual fodder for the evening news. Like our waistlines, the danger to our wellbeing has officially grown to unthinkable proportions. The respected Centers for Disease Control and Prevention calculates that 33% of American adults are overweight and another 34% are clinically obese: more than two-thirds of our adult population carries a body weight above a healthy level.

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Even our children are in jeopardy: 32% of children are overweight and 16% are obese. Of these, 11% are considered extremely obese. In children, as in adults, obesity increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes, some cancers, arthritis, and other chronic conditions. Most frightening of all, health experts estimate that today, for the first time, children will live shorter lives than their parents.

Clearly, something has got to change. We need to transform the way we eat. And we need to do it quickly.

The dilemma of known causes.

One of the most troubling aspects of the obesity epidemic is that the causes are not unknown to us. Lack of exercise and poor quality diet: These are the two primary contributors. They always have been. And yet, much of what we know remains a moving target.

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As nutritional research continues and dietary recommendations are refined, we are beginning to understand that low-fat diets are simply not the answer to losing weight. The fact is, there is no conclusive research that suggests that low-fat diets will help us shed pounds. So what is known?

Besides getting proper amounts of exercise and eating the right amount of calories, we know that we must make better choices about what foods carry those calories. Physicians at the Harvard School of Public Health suggest these keys...

- **Limit the amount of refined carbohydrates we eat;** choose their wholegrain counterparts the majority of the time.
- **Choose proteins lower in saturated fats.** Whenever possible, choose fish or leaner cuts of meat, or plant-based foods like beans, nuts and seeds which also contain healthy oils.
- **Use animal fats (like butter) sparingly.** Substitute flavorful and healthy oils from plants, like canola and olive oils.
- **And this is a must: Eat more vegetables—a lot more vegetables.** Only 10% of Americans are eating the minimum 5 servings of fruit and vegetables that should be consumed every day. In fact, vegetables should take up half the space on our plates at every meal.