

# The Skinny on Obesity

## Excessive body fat

As teens in the US exercise less and eat more, teen obesity is becoming more and more of a concern in our nation. In a nation where McDonald's golden arches are more recognizable than those of the Golden Gate Bridge, we shouldn't be surprised. With a society that would rather run through a drive-through and pick up a greasy burger and fries, than attempt to grab something healthy, it's no wonder why more than 50% percent of teens are considered overweight and 30% are ranked to be obese.

For most teens in the US, the reason for being overweight is simple. It involves not exercising and poor food choices. Many doctors argue that genetics play a big role in teen obesity, but most of the time the only genetic involvement is that of inherited bad choices.

According to the Palo Alto Medical Foundation (PAMF), "Obesity can be defined as an excessive accumulation of body fat which results in individuals being at least 20% heavier than their ideal body weight."

Considering that one in every five teens in the US is considered to be obese, it's obvious that obesity is considered to be a common eating disorder associated with adolescence. Obese teens are susceptible to a number of health problems including heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, and even some forms of cancer.

Obesity not only weakens physical health and dramatically shortens life expectancy, but it significantly alters social experiences and causes unhappiness,

leading to stress and even mental illness.

If you think you might be overweight it is important for you to talk to a physician to become healthier and more fit.

## Eating out adds up

One way to do this is to exercise. Almost half of teens ages twelve to twenty-one don't receive any physical activity on a regular basis.

To change this, schools around the country are trying to create a more exciting atmosphere by adding activities such as roller blading, horseback riding, and even rock climbing to the physical education curriculum.

Another way to become healthier is to choose food wisely. This is especially hard in a nation where the average American consumes three burgers and four orders of fries a week. That comes out to 2,520 calories! And although Americans know fast food isn't good for them, the habit is just as addicting and hard to break and smoking and drinking.

Alison MacNeish, an ACHS junior said, "I think one of the reasons I buy fast food is because it's cheaper. Plus, it's a lot easier to grab something from a drive through than to run in

a store and wait in line for like twenty minutes."

MacNeish also admits that she probably eats out at least once or twice a week and it definitely adds up though.

US Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher said, "We see a nation of young people seriously at risk of starting out obese and dooming themselves to the difficult task of overcoming a tough illness."

Many people use the term obese lightly without knowing what they are talking about. People often hear words such as fat, overweight, chunky that are thrown around with interchangeable meanings. The truth is that someone who is obese is more than just overweight.

According to the American Obesity Association, Obesity is a condition when there is a severe excess amount of fat tissue in one's body. Contrary to what some people may think, obesity is not always a result of someone being an out of control eater, or just being fat.

Obesity is the result of many factors, and can be prevented and treated by recognizing the problem. In fact, the primary problem in treating obesity is that many people don't understand the condition, and fail to recognize it.

"I think that too many Americans are overweight and that it is starting to become accepted. People need to understand it's a problem," said ACHS senior Brian Ford.

## Lazy Americans

The factor used to determine if someone is clinically obese is to calculate their Body Mass Index. Body Mass Index, or BMI, is a mathematical calculation that is used to determining if a person is obese. A person's BMI can be calculated by dividing their weight in pounds by their height in inches squared, and multiplying that number by 704.5. The resulting number will be in the range of 13 to 60. A person with a BMI over thirty is considered to be obese. A healthy BMI is kept between 20 and 25, below 20 is hazardous to the body, between 25 and 29 are considered overweight.

Another determining factor of obesity is a person's waist measurement. A sign of obesity is a presence of excess fat in the stomach region that is not in proportion to the rest of the body. A waist measurement can be taken by using a tape measure and placing it around the waist, above the hipbone and below the rib cage. A measurement of over 40 in boys, and over 35 in girls is a sign that person is at risk of being obese.

Recognizing obesity, and doing something

about it is the first step in helping to treat it. "Obesity is a problem that definitely needs our attention, ultimately, the decision to control ones weight must come from within," said ACHS senior Cara Anderson.

People in the United States are accused of being the "Lazy Americans", with chains of fast food restaurants, over-sized portions, and early lessons to "clean your plate" finally catching up.

Detrimental eating not only causes obesity but a number of other diseases such as, heart disease, type- 2 diabetes, stroke, high blood pressure, anorexia, and bulimia. "I have seen how these common illnesses ruin the lives of young people, and I think it's important to consider eating disorders as a major problem", said Anderson, ACHS senior. Therefore, it is vital to practice habits early that can save one's life.

It is important to be aware of all of the numbers, like weight, measurements, and a BMI. However, they can be deceiving because muscle weighs more than fat. Multiple nutritionists encourage their patients to listen to the body; because it is smarter than the person. By becoming in tune with the system and developing a balance between eating and exercise, one can achieve ultimate health.

## Taste the rainbow

There are many bad habits that should be avoided and most fall into two categories, poor nutrition and lack of exercise. Niko Jefferson, junior, recognizes bad habits during lunch. "At lunch kids go for whatever tastes good, and sometimes it isn't always the healthiest choice". Also, many students such as Sean Peters, senior, said teen nutrition is so poor because "kids just don't care."

Following suggestions for better health will correct the simple problems. Follow a meal plan that keeps food fun. By having a model, it eliminates the risk of excessive eating. A good example is the newly published food pyramid.

The new food pyramid is a model. The base contains whole grains and good oils such as olive oil. The next level has fruits and vegetables in it. Then, good proteins like fish, eggs, and white meats. On top of this level are the dairy products. Then, towards the top are the red meats, even though they are a good source of protein. The apex has sweets

and refined flour products. Besides the essentials the new pyramid suggests vitamin supplements and a daily glass of alcohol to eligible individuals.

Overeating and not exercising permits the body to consume more calories than burned. Health specialists say to watch the consumption of snacks; most are packed with hydrogenated oils that increase the level of saturated fat.

Eat colorful vegetables; different colors add different vitamins and minerals to the diet. Also, vegetables contain fewer calories than most fruits that have a lot of natural sugars.

Remember that whole grains are better than refined flours because they have more fiber and don't increase the body's blood sugar levels. Get moving; exercise is the other half of this equation. Like eating, too much can be a bad thing. Exercise to the necessary extent, to achieve balance. The last suggestion is the most important.

## Dieting is catch-up

Do not diet! Dieting is a "catch-up" game that should be avoided. Cutting calories is dangerous because it places the body in "starvation mode" and interferes with a healthy metabolism. It also leads to deadly eating disorders- anorexia and bulimia. Instead, correct the bad choices and make adjustments to the meal plan.

By recognizing the faults and correcting bad habits America

can change its reputation. Changing unhealthy habits will result in a longer lifestyle.

When asked about students eating habits physical education and health teacher Debbie Rummel had a lot to say.

"Students eating habits are atrocious! They are bombarded with poor nutritional choices in and out of school Students are oblivious to any problems their habits are creating," said Rummel.

This is a problem with many school cafeterias. Cafeterias don't always provide healthy choices that appeal to students.

At ACHS, when students are offered pizza, French fries, and other greasy foods on a daily basis, the potential for future weight problems exists.

"If our school was to take away the junk and serve healthy food, there would be controversy, said Rummel "but if its healthy food or nothing the kids are going to eat."

Overweight people of all ages are at risk of suffering a number of health problem, including diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, and some forms of cancer.

"Our school needs to give us more of a variety of healthy foods, not just overpriced salads and vegetables that aren't even enough to fill us up," said junior Angel Simonini.

Dr. Crawford also agrees that our school needs a better, healthier lunch program. He is all for the change. "If this district continues to contract with a private provider the hopes for changing our programs are not likely," said Dr. Jon Crawford.

The food service the high school uses is Arbor Food Services and this food service is a profit business and the food that they are selling, is bringing in a profit, so why change it?

"The food that is being served at school is negatively affecting the students, said Rummel "it affects their learning ability, behavior, and physical health."



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