

**ARE YOU SURE  
YOU WANT  
FRIES  
WITH THAT?**



**OBESITY & MALNUTRITION IN AMERICA**



**T**he all-American meal: a cheeseburger and fries, washed down with a soda. But there's a problem with this picture - it's unhealthy! This meal is loaded with fat and carbs, while lacking in good nutrients. It all adds up to a plateful of empty calories.

So what are we as a nation to do? Obesity is a widespread problem that leads to many diseases, but it is preventable. First off, what exactly is obesity? According to dictionary.com, it's "the condition of being very fat or overweight" (dictionary). Basically your body is at least 50 pounds over the range that's considered healthy for your body type. They calculate your desired weight range based off of your height and gender. For example, a woman that's five feet and six inches tall should weigh between 123 and 154 pounds, with an ideal weight at 139 pounds (health status).

The opposite of this is assumed to be undernourishment, which is "not nourished





with sufficient or proper food to maintain or promote health or normal growth” (dictionary). Basically, you aren’t getting all of the nutrients you need. However, these two health problems that appear to be on opposite ends of the spectrum can actually occur in one person at the same time. It is possible to be obese and malnourished. But how is this possible? It’s quite simple, really. People’s diets are becoming filled with foods that contain empty calories. Empty calories are found in foods that are high in carbs and fat, but low in vitamins and minerals. You are wasting your appetite on foods that don’t do anything except fill you up and add to your body’s fat stores. These are things like French fries and shakes.

But what’s so bad about eating fried foods and skipping out on the fruits and veggies? As previously mentioned, it’s bad for your health because your body is not getting all of the nutrients it needs to function properly. So what consequences can this type of diet bring? You’d be surprised





at what it can do to you. First off, you are missing out on many key vitamins and minerals. They are all important for a variety of reasons. “[They] boost the immune system, support normal growth and development, and help cells and organs do their jobs” (kid’s health). Basically, they are the reason people are able to function every day.

Having a diet that’s high in empty calories can lead to many diseases, and possibly death. One of the most common health risks involved with obesity is heart disease (CDC). Heart disease is a “disease of the heart and the coronary arteries that is characterized by atherosclerotic arterial deposits that block blood flow to the heart, causing myocardial infarction” (dictionary). Basically, cholesterol lines your arteries until they clog up and the blood can’t flow, which can cause a stroke. Obviously, these can lead to death.

Another disease associated with obesity is Hypertension. It is also known as the





“silent killer”, because the only symptom is high blood pressure before death takes its toll (CDC). Other diseases associated with obesity are Dyslipidemia, liver and gallbladder disease, sleep apnea, and Osteoarthritis. All of these cause a person’s body to function poorly, but are less likely to lead to death.

Besides the diseases related to obesity, there are also common discomforts related to carrying more weight around. For one thing, you have a lot less energy than before. Can you imagine having to carry a backpack that weighed 50 pounds all the time? You’d be exhausted by the end of the day! That’s exactly why people with obesity have so little energy.

It’s also why they’re out of breath all the time. They aren’t accustomed to vigorous exercise, so doing things like walking up a staircase are very tiring. Obesity also brings a lot of body aches and pains. Your body isn’t moving around as much as it needs to, so the muscles tend to cramp





up and ache as they deteriorate. All in all, obesity isn't a pleasant state to be in. A person with obesity can suffer from a variety of symptoms, ranging from mild discomfort to heart disease and, ultimately, death.

Taking care of your body is essential to leading a happy healthy life. People struggling with obesity often suffer from other controllable problems, as previously mentioned. While these people are getting enough calories each day, they often come from unhealthy food sources so they lack proper nutrients. Ironically, missing out on these nutrients can hinder the digestive process, making their body even more weighed down.

Malnutrition also lowers a person's immunity. The body's immune system requires vitamins and minerals to do its job, and it can't do that if it doesn't have the necessary resources (kid's health). So when a person is malnourished and obese, in addition to the ailments and diseases as-





sociated with their condition, they are also probably suffering quite regularly from the common cold. Doesn't that sound miserable? They also get a bit of a "double whammy" from being obese; the body's weight causes it to be at risk for several diseases, and its immune system doesn't have enough strength to fight them off. This is quite a problem.

So how big of a problem is obesity? According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately one third of adults are obese in the USA (CDC statistics). Additionally, seventeen percent of children and teenagers from ages two to nineteen are obese. So not only are Americans extremely overweight, but now they're passing the tradition on to their children.

This is a great increase compared to what our nation was like twenty years ago. The United States had about ten percent of obese adults. That means that in the last twenty years, the number of obese Ameri-





cans has more than tripled! Obviously, the health of this country is getting out of control, and something needs to be done.

First off, how does a person overcome obesity, or how is it cured? Well, it's actually quite simple. By eating a wellbalanced diet with controlled calories, and exercising regularly, the pounds will steadily melt away for a healthy physique that's sure to last.

But what does a healthy diet consist of? According to the MyPlate website, a person on a 2,000 calorie diet needs: two and one half cups of vegetables, two cups of fruit, six ounces of grains, three cups of dairy, and fine and one half ounces of protein every single day. Many people struggle with getting their fruits and veggies in; they have no problem filling their diet with grains, meats, and dairy. Take a cheeseburger for example. The buns are grains, the hamburger is a protein, and the cheese provides a serving of dairy. No fruits and vegetables in sight, unless you





add lettuce to your sandwich. But even then, it's still not an entire serving of vegetables.

As for fitness, what is "regular exercise"? As the name implies, it means that you have a set system for exercising on a consistent basis. A survey I conducted showed that on average, people exercise only two days a week, for thirty to forty-five minutes. In contrast, the average adult needs at least thirty minutes of exercise, five days a week. So if you go running on your treadmill for half an hour before work each morning, then your weekends are free for relaxation from work and exercise.

Now that the results of obesity and malnourishment have been covered, as well as exercise, what are the benefits of living this healthy lifestyle? First and foremost is disease prevention. Your body is now equipped with all of the essential vitamins and minerals, and it doesn't have an excess of calories. This means that your





body will have increased immunity! One great thing about increased immunity and health is your decreased number of days missed from work. That means you can make more money! Who says you can't have health, wealth, and happiness? The secret is eating a well-balanced diet and exercising regularly. You also feel better; you have a higher level of endurance, you aren't experiencing cramping and shortness of breath, and you have more energy throughout the day. Who doesn't want that?

Another great benefit of eating healthily and exercising regularly is that you will live longer. Obesity takes approximately two years off of a person's life expectancy (Medscape). Those extra two years of your life could be spent enjoying yourself in any number of ways, from travelling to playing pickleball.

So after exploring just a few of the benefits of maintaining a healthy weight, this brings us back to obesity and how to stop





it. Who's responsible: the individual, society? I dare to say that it's both. We are accountable for our actions, but society plays a role too. As individuals, everyone needs to make the conscious choice to be healthy. That means limiting fast food intake, increasing the amount of time spent exercising, and eating enough fruits and vegetables. This means no more laying around on your couch and eating McDonald's every day. Honestly, eating right and exercising will make you happier than watching TV.

As mentioned before, society has a responsibility in this too. Is it a coincidence that our nation has one of the highest levels of obesity in the world, compared to other industrialized countries? No. This nation has moved its focus from practical matters to personal pleasures. This is evident in our food consumption and obesity rates.

So what is it that society should do? One way to encourage the public to change





their eating habits is to modify the tax on food. The government could decrease the taxes on healthier foods like fresh fruits and vegetables, and raise taxes on fast food. This would encourage the general public to opt for healthier choices.

Obesity is an issue in this country that is rapidly growing worse and worse. Being overweight is something that can have devastating effects on your health, possibly even fatal. But there is hope! Having a well-balanced diet and regular exercise are the building blocks for a healthy lifestyle that's free of obesity and disease. By individuals taking accountability and making health-conscious choices, along with possible government intervention, this country can bring down the obesity rate and increase the nation's overall health status.



# SURVEY RESULTS

This anonymous survey was conducted online using surveymonkey.com, with a total of 44 people surveyed of different ages and lifestyles. The results are as follows:

1. How physically healthy are you? 11.5% were extremely healthy, 25% were very healthy, 45% were moderately healthy, 14% were slightly healthy, and 4.5% were not at all healthy.

2. How important is exercise to you? The results of this question were: 10.33% exercised daily, 33.33% exercised regularly (but not daily), 5% went 3 times a week, 33.33% were inconsistent in their workout schedules, and 18% reported a sedentary lifestyle.

3. What do you do most often for exercise? 7.3% reported weight lifting, 51.2% walk, 22% run, 4.9% go hiking, 2.4% swim, 4.9% dance, 2.4% do aerobics, 2.4% do Pilates, and 2.4% do other team sports.

4. Do you feel you get enough exercise, too much, or not enough? 4.6% reported getting too much, 20.5% reported getting the right amount, and 74.9 said that they didn't get enough.

5. In a typical week, how many times do you exercise? 5 people reported none, 1 person said once a week, 13 people said twice a week, 7 people said 3 times, 3 people said 4 times, 8 people said 5 times, 1 person said 6, and 4 people said they exercised 7 times a week.

6. On an average day, how long do you exercise? 25% said they exercise 0-15 minutes at a time, 29.6% said 15-30 minutes, 31.8% said 30-45 minutes, and 13.6% said they exercise for an hour or more at a time.

7. How would you rate your energy level on an average day? In response to this question, 18% of those surveyed rated their energy levels as below average, 38% reported being average, 18% were great as long as they had a nap, and 25% reported high energy levels.

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