

EDITORIAL

Obesity; Simple Diagnosis, Difficult Treatment

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In this issue of the journal there is an interesting and important topic of research on obesity. Obesity is fast becoming an important major health issue in Malaysia. Some factors that result in obesity among Malaysians especially children are suggested. Besides physical effects that are well know, the possible psychological effects are also suggested and a look at possible treatments for Malaysians is suggested.

Keywords: Obesity, Malaysian, depression, anxiety

INTRODUCTION

Obesity is often termed as having an overly high body mass index (BMI). When a person's weight is extremely more than its ideal weight, we call it obesity. As Malaysia is rich in a variety of food, it has been reported that one in every ten children has the symptoms of obesity. There are many factors that result in obesity such as the role of the media, choices of food and parenting style. Fortunately, there are also several solutions to overcome these factors.

COMMON CAUSES AS SEEN BY LAY PERSON

Firstly, children are supposedly active individuals. Television will catch their attention. So instead of playing outdoors, they would rather watch television programmes. The same happens to adults after work or on Sundays. Due to lack of exercise, the fat in the body builds up gradually to cause one to become obese.

Secondly, when it comes to the choice of food, "fast food" ranks top in children's and Malaysian adults food choices. Fast food is high in sugar and carbohydrate. When children consume too much fast food, eventually the excess glucose will be converted into fat.

Thirdly, is the parenting style. Most parents are overworked and when they come home, the tired adults are too tired to prepare a meal. Most often they will just call for fast food delivery and it will be delivered to their door step. In addition, parents do not bother much about what their children consume. This gives freedom to the children to eat whatever they want which includes junk food, a contributor to obesity.

Fourthly, the actual causes of obesity are numerous. Time spent watching television, poor choices of food and parenting style are some of the causes of obesity among children. There are also genetic, environmental, biological and other social factors.

EFFECTS OF OBESITY

There are many well known physical effects of obesity that need not be elaborated. Most non-communicable diseases are associated with obesity. As such it is imperative to note that obesity does have mental and psychological effects.

Being overweight or underweight affects emotional health in several different ways. In fact, the mental health effects of obesity can be as damaging as the physical effects, according to recent obesity research.

The emotional and mental health issues caused by being overweight include social discrimination, low self-esteem, and even thoughts of ending life. However, research shows that being underweight can have even worse mental health effects. Here's a summary of the emotional, mental, and social effects of being overweight and underweight;

Obese People Are More Prone to Depression and Anxiety

Obese women and men are less physically active because it's not only more difficult to move around, it's embarrassing to change in the locker rooms at the gym. Many obese people don't feel comfortable in fitness classes because of their size and shape. This lack of physical activity can cause depression and anxiety (while physical activity reduces feelings of depression and anxiety).

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Overweight People Are Seen as Lacking in Willpower

Social discrimination includes the way society views you based on your appearance. The mental health effects of obesity include social discrimination – people often judge and mistreat individuals who are overweight. Obese people are seen as lazy and lacking in willpower, or incapable of looking after themselves properly. They're socially undesirable, which increases their chances of anxiety and depression.

Overweight Students Have Poor College/University Attendance

Obesity research from the USA reveals that obese young women are half as likely to attend college as slim girls. The study which tracked nearly 11,000 American adolescents, found that young men did not differ from their non-obese peers in college attendance. Obese young women are also more likely to use drugs and alcohol than their slimmer peers.

The finding concludes: "those girls are far more vulnerable to the non-health risks of obesity reinforce the notion that body image is more important to girls' self-concept and that social norms have greater effects on the education of girls than boys."

The emotional health effects of obesity in girls are stronger than boys because girls are more tuned in to their appearance. Body image affects not only their self-esteem, but their levels of achievement as well.

Underweight People Are More Likely to be Depressed

A study from the Centre for Mental Health Research at the Australian National University studied the mental health effects of being overweight and underweight, and found that obese people struggle with depression and anxiety. Surprisingly, underweight people were more likely to deal with mental health problems.

The study suggests: "Underweight people also have the advantage in that they have less physical disability and physical ill-health than obese people, and that masks the underlying tendency to anxiety and depression, but when we extract out the physical ill-health component, we're left with this picture that it's the underweight that have the worst mental health."

Whether you're overweight or underweight, taking care of your emotional and mental health is one of the best things you can do for your body and life!

SUGGESTED TREATMENT

For the children mentioned above, parents need to limit the time spent on watching television. By limiting the time spent on television, children are more likely to be more active playing outside the home. Playing in the park enables them to move their limbs and fight the accumulation of fat. As children are easily tempted by eating fast food, parents need to be stricter with the choices of food their children consume. A balanced diet is needed for children's growth. Instead of fast food, more vegetables and proteins are recommended. As vegetables have antioxidants which boost the body's immune system and protein increases brain power, a healthier choice of food will produce healthier children. Busy parents should sacrifice some time preparing home cooked meals.

BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION TECHNIQUES

Treatment for obesity will be most successful if you create a long-term plan with your doctor. A reasonable goal might be to begin making lifestyle changes by increasing physical activity and eating healthy foods. Your initial goal should be to improve your health, not to achieve an ideal weight.

Guidelines suggest a goal of losing 10% of your body weight in 6 months. Doctors often recommend that people make lifestyle changes for at least 6 months before trying medicines or surgery. Counseling will also help if you use food to cope with depression, loneliness, anxiety, or boredom; you need to learn new skills to deal with those feelings.

Cut calories

Eating fewer calories while increasing activity is the best way to lose weight. For most adults, eating 1,200 to 1,500 calories a day for women and 1,500 to 1,800 calories a day for men is recommended for weight loss.

People often convince themselves that they don't overeat. Keeping a food journal can help you find out how many calories you consume in a day. Then you can set a goal to cut out 500 to 1,000 calories a day. This will help you lose 1 to 2 pounds a week.

Limiting your calories to very low levels might seem like the way to quick weight loss, but it can have serious negative effects on your body and your ability to keep the weight off.

Research shows that limiting calories-not the types of foods you eat-causes more weight loss over the long term.

For example, cutting only carbohydrate or fat will not cause any more weight loss than a healthful and balanced low-calorie diet.

Eat healthier foods-don't diet

Rather than focusing on a particular type of diet, try to eat healthier foods. Don't try to restrict the foods you love. Eat less of them. Eat smaller portions.

Take a look at the dietary guidelines for good health.

Increase activity

Physical activity helps you burn more calories. Overall, experts recommend doing moderate or vigorous activity to get and stay healthy.

One of the best ways to increase your activity is by walking.

Keep track of your steps with a step counter or pedometer. If you have a desk job, you may be surprised to see how little you move in a typical day. Start with a goal of increasing your steps by 2,000 steps a day and work up to 10,000 to 12,000.

CONCLUSION

Being obese is bad but is not the end of the world. There have been many research and techniques used to reduce weight. The key words in getting improvement from this unhealthy lifestyle illness are insight and motivation. The first is the understanding and awareness that one is having the problem and the second is the motivation to follow the strict behavior modification techniques to change to a healthier lifestyle. The change is not just with food but overall lifestyle changes. That seems to be the most difficult hurdle. It is not just the motivation of starting change but the also the motivation for maintaining that change.