

Health News You Can Use - Teen Edition

OBESITY

COMPARING OUR CRISIS HERE AND IN THE CARIBBEAN

THE FACTS

- **Obesity has increased in the past 20 years and more and more Americans are suffering from this preventable diseases.**
- **More than 50% of Americans do not take part in the recommended amount of physical activity everyday.**
- **Approximately 300,000 people die each year due to health issues related to obesity.**



What Is Obesity?

Obesity is the condition by which one has accumulated excess body fat that becomes dangerous to their health and may drastically decrease their life expectancy. Obesity can lead to a variety of health problems, including heart disease, diabetes, hypertension and sometimes breathing problems. Obese persons have a much shorter life expectancy than those who are not. As such, it's important to know the difference between being obese and being overweight. Being overweight refers to weight increase with relation to your height. This weight usually comes from muscles and bones. To be considered obese one must have a Body Mass Index (BMI) above 30.

An Overview of Obesity in New York/Brooklyn (East New York)

Over 173,000 New Yorkers are obese, with more than 73,000 newly diagnosed with diabetes from 2002 to 2004. The obesity rate among New York City women is higher than the rate for men (21%). In this region 43% of elementary school children, ages 6-11, are documented as overweight. According to the New York City Department of Health, obesity increased among both whites (20%) and Hispanics (14%), whereas the nation experienced a significant increase only among Caucasians (7%). In addition, the obesity rate among older New Yorkers rose by 28%.

Hitting closer to home, seven out of 11 neighborhoods are suffering high rates of obesity in Brooklyn, according to the 2004 Obesity Report. In heavily populated African-American neighborhoods, such as Bed-Stuy, Crown Heights, and East New York, three out of every 10 adults are considered to be obese. East New York ranks as the top neighborhood of having a percentage of about 31 people being affected by obesity. It can be concluded that out of that 30%, a majority of those that are obese are Black, Hispanic, and female. There are a number of factors that contribute to the growing obesity rate in this region: lack of markets that sell suitable produce, smoking, fast food accessibility, lifestyle, cultural customs and the lack of awareness in regard to body weight and health issues related to obesity.

Health News You Can Use - Teen Edition



An Overview of Obesity in the Caribbean

In the Caribbean during the 1990s, the percent of obese women was 58% and men 20%. Only 20 years earlier, these percentages were 20% and 7% respectively. The magnitude of the problem in the Caribbean is expected to increase as weight gain in this population is higher than that seen in Black Americans in the US. Reports show that 38.6 % of men and 34.7% of women knew their weight. In addition, 25.7% of obese men and 19.2% of obese women found their weight acceptable. Cultural customs, increased availability of high caloric foods, increased wealth in the region and a shift in employment market to many more sedentary professions (as well as the lack of awareness in regard to body weight and health issues related to obesity), are specifically observed as factors for increased obesity in the Caribbean.

Obesity affects 11% of Jamaican teenagers between the ages of 10–15 years and 35% of those between the ages of 15–18 years. In Barbados, 3.9% of children are obese. More Caribbean women are obese than men, a trend that starts in early adolescence in many Caribbean countries. This disparity between teenage boys and girls is evident with the obesity rate for young girls at 76% in Guyana and 47% for young girls in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The disparity appears to be related to the cultural preference for a carbohydrate-rich diet for pre-pubescent Caribbean girls.

Who's at Risk?

- Children, adolescents, and adults of all races, sex, age, and academic level can all be at risk for obesity. (It is said that obesity starts in childhood, it is at that stage when a child begins to develop their eating habits. So if a child is obese as a child more than likely he/she will be obese as an adult).
- Blacks and Latinos have higher rates of obesity.
- Women are at a higher risk of being obese than men.
- People between the ages of 50-64 have higher rates of obesity.
- Those with bad eating habits and lack of physical activity.
- Those in low income households, as high calorie/ fatty foods are usually lower in cost.

Warning signs that one might be obese include:

- An aching pain in the knees and/or back
- Difficulty walking and moving
- Shortness of breath after small acts of exertion, such as climbing a flight of stairs or walking a block
- Emotional problems like depression
- Rashes that appear in folds of skin
- Participation in less than 30 minutes of physical activity a day if an adult and less than 60 minutes a day if a child
- Consistent intake of large portions of fried or unhealthy foods as opposed to fruits and vegetables

How to Get Help:

1. Change the way you eat. Eat less junk food and more healthy food. You must also pay attention to the portions that you are eating.
2. Become more active. Instead of sitting around watching TV all day, go outside and take a walk or play a sport with a friend.
3. Keep track of your BMI, which is Body Mass Index. Your BMI can serve as an indicator that you need to change your lifestyle.

Here are some places that you can contact for help with obesity:

Shape Up America!

Phone: (240) 715-3900
E-mail: info@shapeup.org
Web Address: www.shapeup.org

Aim for a Healthy Weight

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
Web Address: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/lose_wt/index.ht

Log on to our website to view our teen round table episode discussion on Obesity.
Go to our Health News TV link under "Community Programs & Events".



*This piece has been researched by students in the Kingsbrook/BQLI AHEC SHIP Mentorship program.
Research team: Shanice Gibbs, Jason Browne, Justina Pierre, Morolake Thompson, Margaret Kwateng*