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WR 222

5 Nov. 2016

Obesity in America and Why it’s an Issue

According to the National Institute of Health, obesity and overweight are the second leading cause of preventable death. Although there are some fit people who eat healthy and exercise regularly, Americans are generally known to be overweight or obese. This is because of many different reasons. Some of these reasons are: lack of physical activity, lack of quality education on nutrition and how to make healthy choices, and an inadequate amount of sleep or having an inconsistent sleep schedule.

According to obesity.org, “Obesity is a disease that affects more than one-third of the U.S. adult population (approximately 78.6 million Americans)” (1). This is a very high number, which needs to be reduced immediately. As stated in an article by the CNBC, “The U.S. obesity epidemic continues to worsen: The latest reports show that 40 percent of U.S. women are obese, and American teenagers are also continuing to put on weight” (Maggie Fox, CNBC). Teens and adults are most at risk for obesity, because that is when their metabolism slows down drastically, or they get too busy to get regular exercise.

Not only is obesity bad for your overall health and wellness, but having this disease can also really affect your bank account. Having to go to the doctor’s more often and getting tests, will affect the money you spend on healthcare compared to if you were making healthier choices. Someone who continues to eat healthy and exercise regularly will have less costs in medical bills. The increase in obesity trends will also cause the cost of health care across the U.S. to increase, and many people already struggle enough with health care costs. Being obese can cause many other health problems such as: cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, diabetes, breathing problems and many others. If someone exercises and eats healthier, they’re less at risk to develop these health problems, which would save a person thousands in health care bills.

Nutrition is one of the most important aspects in staying healthy and maintaining a healthy weight. Children across the U. S. are not getting the correct nutrition needed for their growing bodies. This is due to lack of nutritional education and access to cheap, fast food. Most children are not educated about the food pyramid or appropriate portion sizes until they are 13 or older. I know personally, I was not taught these things until I was 13 and it was a very vague lecture over what is healthy to eat, and what is not. These health programs should explain what a proper serving size for each food group is. Another issue family’s face in the nutrition category is eating fast food. Fast food restaurants are cheap and convenient which causes people to eat there when their schedules get busy. There should be stricter regulations on these fast food restaurants, because they serve very unhealthy food made out of preservatives and sodium. These restaurants should be required to not use as many preservatives and have regulations on the amount of sodium and other oils/fats they use in their food. Eating from fast food chains often is an important risk factor in obesity.

Although lack of nutrition and nutritional education is one of the biggest factors in becoming obese, another is not getting an adequate amount of physical activity. Many American adults do not reach the recommended amount of exercise. According to Mayoclinic.com, adults should exercise for at least seventy-five minutes of vigorous aerobic activity per week or at least one hundred and fifty minutes of moderate aerobic activity per week. Americans should be required to exercise at least sixty minutes per day at least 5 days a week, this can be regulated through one’s smartphone, fitbit, or apple watch. This exercise can range from a simple 60-minute walk, to fitness classes and crossfit, as long as the person is doing at least sixty minutes of exercise per day. This should be required for all Americans, unless they have a disability or other health problem that would prevent them from safely exercising.

There are many ways to prevent obesity, one many people do not know about is a consistent sleep schedule. Studies show that having a regular sleep schedule can actually help lower your body fat. Also, waking up at around the same time everyday can also positively affect your health. According to Harvard’s School of Public Health, “people who get too little sleep have a higher risk of weight gain and obesity than people who get seven to eight hours of sleep a night” (“Sleep and Obesity Prevention,” 1). This article states that the reason lack of sleep is a factor of obesity is because it causes increased hunger, decreasing physical activity, and giving people more time to eat. This is an issue in the United States, especially among college students who stay up late studying or doing homework, and hard working adults who work long, exhausting hours which causes them to not get an adequate amount of sleep.

According to the National Institute of Health:

Sleep is an important modulator of neuroendocrine function and glucose metabolism and sleep loss has been shown to result in metabolic and endocrine alterations, including decreased glucose tolerance, decreased insulin sensitivity, increased evening concentrations of cortisol, increased levels of ghrelin, decreased levels of leptin, and increased hunger and appetite. Recent epidemiological and laboratory evidence confirm previous findings of an association between sleep loss and increased risk of obesity. (National Institute of Health, 1).

This is a summary of research that was done by Guglielmo Beccuti and Silvana Pannain at a University in Italy, which explains the chemistry in why an inadequate amount of sleep can affect our bodies’ health, such as obesity. People should aim to get at least eight hours of sleep every night in order to stay healthy and keep off the excess weight.

According to the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, “Insufficient sleep is associated with obesity, yet little is known about how repeated nights of insufficient sleep influence energy expenditure and balance” (PNAS, 1). The study showed that insufficient sleep increased total daily energy expenditure by about 5%. However, energy intake, especially at night after dinner, was in excess of energy needed to maintain energy balance. They also found that insufficient sleep did in fact lead to weight gain and there were slight differences in men and women. “Sex differences showed women, not men, maintained weight during adequate sleep, whereas insufficient sleep reduced dietary restraint and led to weight gain in women” (PNAS, 1). This is interesting because women gained more weight when they did not get an adequate amount of sleep. This study also stated, “Our findings suggest that increased food intake during insufficient sleep is a physiological adaptation to provide energy needed to sustain additional wakefulness” (PNAS). This study was very successful in finding information on the correlation between the amount of sleep someone has compared to their weight gain.

A study by Dr. James E. Gangwisch at the Mailman School of Public Health at Colombia University, conducted an experiment on lab rats to test if sleep duration was correlated with obesity and weight gain. The article about this experiment stated, “Mounting evidence from laboratory studies with animals and humans suggests a mechanistic link between lack of sleep and increasing body weight. Prolonged sleep deprivation has been shown to increase food intake in rats” (journalsleep.org, 1). The doctors suggested that if the experiment was conducted on humans, they would generate the same results. They conducted the experiment on a sample of U.S. citizens. The conclusion of experiment conducted on humans showed that the doctor’s hypothesis was correct in which the amount of sleep someone got was correlated in how much weight they would gain.

Having a healthy lifestyle and making smart, healthy choices can help prevent one from being at risk of obesity. If someone wants to keep their healthy lifestyle they should remember to get adequate exercise, proper nutrition from the correct serving size of foods, and try to maintain a consistent sleep schedule. These are some important facts bundled together in order to prove a point that obesity is an issue in the United States. This issue and some of the solutions need to be shared with people across America to prevent further obesity mortalities and other health issues that arise from being obese, keeping the obesity trends from growing, and possibly decreasing the rate of obesity.

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