

Stuff You Should Know About Fat

Next to climate change obesity is the most talked about subject today. But how much of what you read is true? This article lays it out. Find Bill Allin at <http://billallin.com>

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With two-thirds of Americans overweight or obese and obesity in alarming numbers finding its way into every nation, even poor families in poor nations, let's have a serious look at what the fuss is about.

To begin, let's establish a couple of things. First, if we take everything we eat and drink, then subtract from that nutrition what we use up in energy or function of our organs, convert to muscle or expel as body wastes, what gets left over is stored as fat. Fat is stored potential energy.

Second, no young child aspires to be fat as an adult. None aspire to be insurance salesmen, call centre employees or cubicle workers in offices either, but those are conscious choices a person makes later.

To return to the first point, obese people can't say they didn't notice they were putting on weight. That's the criticism many slim people have of the heavyweights: "they ate too much." While that point can't be debated, the more important point is what they could have done about it. The answer is: they didn't know what to do. In fact, nobody does. Lots of people make fortunes selling to people who want to lose weight, but none are guaranteed, some created yo-yo dieting, some could even be harmful.

I am reminded of an old joke about the owner of a donkey who was determined that he could train his animal to adapt to life without food if he used methods similar to what nature uses to train animals to adapt to other adverse conditions and environmental changes. A year after the man began his program of gradually lowering the amount of food he gave his donkey, a friend asked him how he had made out with the experiment. He replied, "Just my luck, I got him to the point where he could live completely without food and the stupid animal died."

What to do to overcome obesity or being overweight is precisely the same thing as what slim people do to avoid gaining too much weight. Trouble is, no one, including medical science, knows exactly what that is. As ironic as it sounds, obese people usually have more efficient absorption of nutrients in their guts than slim folks. Some could eat like birds and still gain weight. Many slim people could eat boatloads of food and still remain thin because their digestive systems don't work as efficiently.

Diet? Sure but look at the abundance of diet advice we get in newspapers, magazines and on television--especially look at how each suggestion conflicts with other suggestions by "experts"--and you can quickly see that no one really knows. Studies have proven that so-called yo-yo dieting (diet, gain weight, diet, gain weight, repeatedly) has a more negative impact on body organs than simply carrying around too much weight. Even maintaining extra weight is healthier than losing weight rapidly.

Exercise off what you eat? Sure, but who is prepared to exercise for that much time in a day, setting aside all other commitments in the process? Society mitigates against it anyway. What would you think of a person who exercised--who even walked--for three hours each day? Could you spare that much time out of your day, every day? If you did, what would you have to sacrifice from your present life?

Why not just eat less? Have you ever tried to do that over a long period of time? Most people who have tried it learn to despise dieting because they always feel hungry.

How about eating different foods? Some kinds of food--such as high fibre--flushes stuff through your gut so fast that it doesn't have time to absorb some of the nutrition in the food. That might be okay if you knew how to balance what you lost by taking supplements a few hours before you ate the fibre and afterwards emptied your bowel. But, despite the advertising that gives you the impression that it knows what a balanced diet is, no one knows for certain. Study evidence conflicts. If you plan to diet, choose your vitamin and mineral supplements carefully, then commit to the bet of your life.

Californians seem to have something going for them. In a study of obesity rates in the U.S. from 1976 to 1999, obesity and overweight numbers increased across the board. However, as of 2007, California was the only state where the obesity rate did not increase. The study did not say exactly what had changed in California that could account for the change. No one is guessing that having a former Mr. Universe as governor has made the difference.

If you are overweight and you lose some of that excess, you will live longer, studies show. But likely only a few months longer. Excess weight reduces a woman's chance of getting pregnant. The U.S. National Institutes for Health believes that obesity accounts for why women under 25 are the fastest growing group experiencing infertility. Losing ten percent of body weight results in an improvement in your sex life.

People who often eat dinner or breakfast at restaurants or fast food outlets double their risk of becoming obese.

Leptin, our body's built-in way to convince us to stop eating when we are full doesn't work in supplement form on most overweight people. Their bodies have become insensitive to it.

Why do people eat more than their bodies need? My personal belief is that eating is a pleasure that never fails over the short term. Food never demands a divorce, gives you a hangover, threatens you or nags you. Only over the long term might it betray you with unwanted fat. But then, that applies to all kinds of activities we do when we are young that we survive, get thrills from, but pay for 20, 40 or more years later when our bodies age faster than those who played it safer.

About ten percent of our fat cells die every year. New ones grow again. Our total number of fat cells remains the same throughout our life. Dieting, even having the stomach stapled, has no effect on the body's number of fat cells. However, new fat cells do not begin their lives bloated with fat. They only grow as the body needs to store more fat. New fat cells begin as skinny fat cells.

The only permanent way to reduce the total number of fat cells in the body is by liposuction. Even liposuction does not remove fat from around body organs, so whatever risk fat presents to them remains unless it is reduced in some other way. Liposuction may make you look good, but not necessarily any healthier.

Obesity occurs commonly within families, but science is not certain if that has to do with DNA (nature) or family eating, exercising and related environmental problems (nurture).

Your brain is comprised about 70 percent of fat. Losing that fat is not recommended. Bottlenose dolphins use a fat sack in their heads to amplify sound as part of their sonar hearing ability. Human fatheads have not advanced to that stage so far as I know.

Whale bodies are surrounded by fat, in some cases up to 45 cm (20 inches) thick. They use it as insulation against the cold of the oceans. In our body fat tends to hold heat in as well, often making us sweaty when slim people feel cool. Camels in the desert don't want to conserve heat, which is why they concentrate their fat in one or two humps on their backs. People who lose lots of weight often complain they feel cold because they have lost subcutaneous fat that previously kept them warm (sometimes sweaty).

Still confused about fat? At least you have more knowledge about it now, and you have lots of company. One factor all serious health professionals agree about is that losing weight safely should be a long term project involving serious lifestyle changes.

In conclusion, it's worth noting that fat is essential to life. When stored body fat reaches zero percent, you die. That's why anorexia nervosa sufferers die even when they are being force fed in hospitals. Like everything else in life, the key is moderation. Even when dieting. Let the first three letters of that word be your guide to caution.

Bill Allin is the author of ***Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems***, a guidebook for teachers and parents who want to grow children who are healthy and well balanced in mind as well as in body.

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