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America's Fight with Fat

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Americans are getting fatter according to a recent *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) [study](#). In the US, 38 percent of adults and 30 percent of children are obese. During the past 40 years, obesity rates have doubled for adults and tripled for children, based on a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) [report](#).

The perception that Americans are “eating right” and “getting fit” clashes with reality. The US ranks as the most obese country in the world, according to a University of Washington Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation [survey](#).

The current US obesity statistics are unacceptable in a population that has access to nutrition education, healthy food, and the freedom to physically exercise. And the kids in this country's next generation deserve better.

Obesity is commonly labeled as a life-style disease due to its association with unhealthy diet and sedentary habits. Choices people make about their food and physical activities can prevent or contribute to obesity. [Public health efforts](#) aim to educate people about nutritious foods, healthy portion sizes, and fat-burning physical activities. Despite these efforts, obesity rates continue to rise.

The JAMA study reports that race and other socio-economic factors can affect obesity rates. Black and Hispanic adults and children, low-education female, and children from low-education households have higher obesity rates.

The JAMA study also reports that one-third of white adults and children are obese. Obesity does not discriminate.

Grain products and snack foods have replaced vegetables, fruit, and milk in the American diet, according to the *Applied Physiology Nutrition and Metabolism* article, "Childhood Obesity: Food, Nutrient, and Eating Habit Trends and Influences."

And lack of physical activity is a primary cause of obesity, reports the *Comprehensive Physiology* article, "Lack of Exercise is a Major Cause of Chronic Disease." Less than 8% of US teens meet the suggested one-hour per day of physical activity the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) recommends.

Added sugar, sugar that is added to food during processing, now makes up to 25% of the daily calories in US diets, the [CDC](#) reports. WHO recommends limiting added sugar to 10% of total daily calories because it directly contributes to excess body fat.

Obesity is characterized by excess body fat, especially in the abdomen. [WebMD](#) reports that obesity is diagnosed when a person's body mass index (BMI) is 30 or higher. BMI is a weight-to-height ratio used to determine over- or underweight conditions. The BMI for an obese child is greater than 95% of all children in the same age group.

For those interested in calculating their BMI, the National Institute of Health offers an online BMI [calculator](#) and BMI scale. To add perspective, a person who is 5'6" and weighs 150 pounds has a healthy BMI of 24. Add five pounds and the BMI rises to 25, and the person is overweight. Add another 30 pounds and this person is obese.

The JAMA article also reports that people with lower incomes generally have higher obesity rates than individuals with higher income. And from the early 1980's through the 2000's inexpensive sugary sweets and sodas have replaced more costly fruits and vegetables in the American diet, as detailed in a CDC [article](#).

Yet, the [US Department of Agriculture](#) estimates that the cost of eating healthfully for a family of four is \$200 per week, and that figure factors in higher cost-of-living areas on the east and west coasts.

People with obesity have higher rates of heart disease, diabetes, some cancers, and Alzheimer's disease. And obese children have increased risk of bone fractures and asthma due to the heavy loads they carry. More important, obese children are four times as likely as non-obese children to be obese as adults. And even normal weight children with obese parents have twice the risk of becoming obese in adulthood.

More than 70% of new year's resolutions aim for getting healthy and losing weight, [Nielsen](#) ratings report. And 2017 has just begun. [Getting educated](#) about how to combat obesity-related chronic disease with healthy food choices and physical activity is important to your health and the health of your kids. This year, make *and keep* your new year's resolution to get healthy. The kids of this country's next generation deserve better!