The Epidemic of Obesity

Obesity is an epidemic that continues to increase on a global scale, with the United States (US) and China having the largest increase from 1980 to 2008, followed by Brazil and Mexico (Pérez Rodrigo, 2013). After smoking, obesity is the second of the leading preventable causes of death worldwide (Ianosi, Comes, & Jimborean, 2015). Obesity is also associated with other chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and certain types of cancers. Obesity is measured by Body Mass Index (BMI) which is a measurement using height and weight. A person is considered obese if they have a BMI ≥ 30. For a perspective on the obesity epidemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) has estimated that 40 million children under the age of 5 were overweight in 2011 (Wahlqvist et al., 2015). The obesity rate is high in all age groups in many countries, but especially in children and adolescents in developed countries and economies in transition (Pérez Rodrigo, 2013).

Causes of Obesity

In the last several decades, society has changed in many ways. Family life has become hectic due to both parents working, leaving little time to prepare healthy meals or enjoy family life. Often times, fast-food is an unhealthy alternative that eventually becomes the norm. Also, technology has affected how children, adolescents, and adults spend their time. Society has become consumed with technology causing a decrease in physically activity. Other factors that can cause or increase obesity are socioeconomic status, level of education, social environment, gender, and age. One of the most consistent findings is that those with a higher level of education tend to be in better health. This is especially true for women. For example, the prevalence of adult obesity is 23.4% for women with a college degree and 42.1% for women who are high school dropouts (Cawley, 2015).
The Consequences of Obesity

Concern about the health risks, medical care costs, and other consequences of obesity has led to a host of policies and programs implemented by companies, school districts, and governments to prevent and reduce obesity (Cawley, 2015). But not enough is being done. There needs to be a focus on taking a proactive approach to significantly reduce obesity, especially in children. A significant reduction in obesity translates to a significant reduction in the comorbidities and associated medical costs.

Take Action

It is never too late to take action. There are several things we can do as a society to decrease the rate of obesity and its associated chronic health conditions. Be an advocate for good health by developing a healthy lifestyle that includes a healthy diet and physical activity. Reduce the time spent on technology (internet, social media, gaming, etc.) and utilize the time to get family members, friends, and others within the community to take part in physical activities. The key is to get as many involved as possible to spread the word. Teaching and advocating for a healthy lifestyle must be our number one priority, especially for our children and future generations.

