Childhood Obesity Essay, Research Paper

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In today’s society childhood obesity is considered to be an epidemic. The increase in obesity is not caused by the change in the gene pool, but rather by the change in the environment. This causes vulnerable populations to express the obesity phenotype (Stune, 1999). One in seven children ages 6-17 are considered to be obese. Most nutritionists will say that this is do to the lack of parental guidance. A child’s parents should teach their child proper eating habits so that they won’t run across problems in the future (Tomlin, 1999).

According to the article Facts about childhood Obesity and Overweightness, obese children are statistically not active, and their diets are high in fats and low in energy foods, like carbohydrates . Most doctors will calculate a child’s body mass index (BMI), to figure out just how overweight a child is. If a child’s BMI is over 30, they are considered obese. In order to calculate one’s BMI, you would divide the your weight in kilograms by the square of your height in meters (Mokdad, 1999).

What causes obesity?

Weight gain among children is likely due to a combination of factors including: poor

dietary habits, genetic makeup, family lifestyle, socioeconomic status, and a child’s ethnicity. Obesity is more prevalent among Hispanic, African-American and American Indian children, particularly girls (Mayohealth.org 1997).

Overweight children are not necessarily overeaters. Unfortunately, much of the

food they enjoy contains high amounts of calories. A child doesn’t have to eat huge quantities of food to put on excess weight. An extra 200 calories a day (the amount in four home-made chocolate chip cookies) can cause your child to gain almost one-half pound a week (Miller 3).

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Studies show that children’s excessive consumption of high-calorie soft drinks

and fruit beverages may be adding to the problem. The average teen drinks almost 65 gallons of soft drinks annually; school-age children have more than doubled their consumption of these beverages in the past two decades. Children also eat a lot of fast-food, which tends to be high in fat and calories (Miller 5).

Inactivity most likely to blame

Weight control involves balancing food intake with the energy burned in everyday

activities. Although diet is a factor, low levels of physical activity may play a greater role in childhood obesity than eating lots of high-calorie food.

Why are children today less active? Many blame increased television viewing. Watching TV doesn’t require much energy and often is accompanied by snacking on high-calorie foods. The American Heart Association reports that, on average, children watch 17 hours of television a

week. And that’s not counting the time spent playing video and computer games. One study found the odds of being overweight were nearly five times greater for youth watching more than five hours of television per day compared with those who watched from zero to two hours per day (Mayohealth.org 1997).

According to a 1996 U.S. Surgeon General’s report on fitness, nearly half of

young people ages 12 to 21 are not vigorously active. The American College of Sports Medicine reports that, due to financial constraints, only one-third of schools now offer physical education classes and many children today find team sports too competitive or costly to join (Mayohealth.org 1997).

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Heredity has strong influence

The risk of becoming obese is greatest among children who have two obese

parents. Danish adoption records provide a unique perspective on the issue of heredity versus environment when studying obesity in children. Researchers studied 540 adopted Danish children, who are now adults. The scientists wanted to know if weights of the children were closer to their biological or adoptive parents. They found no relationship between the weight of

the adoptive parents and adopted children. But there was a strong link between the weight of the adopted children and their biological parents, even though 90 percent of the children had been adopted before the age of 1 (Miller 10).

The researchers concluded that genetic factors are important in determining obesity in adults. And when a genetic tendency is combined with habits that promote weight gain, it’s more likely that a child will be overweight. Important: If obesity is common in your family, pay extra attention to diet and exercise (Miller 11).

Effects of Obesity

Obesity as a child will lead to health problems in the future as one enters adulthood. Obesity is strongly linked to cardiovascular diseases and Diabetes. This disorder also will cause some forms of cancer , hypertension, and also Arthritis. Another consequence of obesity is the effects it has on the skin.

Cardiovascular disease

A major health risk that occurs from obesity is cardiovascular diseases. Studies have shown that if a child is obese, it will lead into their young adult lives. By being obese at a young

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age it lays the ground work for cardiovascular diseases. There is a close relationship between obesity and cardiovascular disease. There is a excess of fat circulating in the blood that turns into plaque. This plaque accumulates around an artery to block the flow of blood. In severe cases, the coronary arteries are blocked. These arteries irrigate the heart. Obesity puts a strain on the veins and arteries that are blocked by this plaque build up.

Diabetes

Another health risk caused by obesity is diabetes. Obesity increases the risk of non-

insulin dependent diabetes mellitus. The fat tissue that is amassed has two roles in diabetes. One is the increased demand for insulin and, it also creates insulin resistance in obese individuals. Obesity cause a resistance to insulin that increases the insulin production to compensate the excess of glucose circulating in the blood. This excess causes damage to beta cells in the pancreas , producing insulin.

Cancer

With obesity comes increased risks to certain forms of cancer. Young men have a significant higher mortality rate for colorectal and prostate cancer. Menopausal women with high upper body fat localization have an increase risk of developing breast cancer. Women also have a higher risk in getting cancer of tile uterus and ovaries.

Hypertension

Another cause of obesity is hypertension. Young adults, age 20 – 45, are six times more likely to have hypertension then normal weight peers. The distribution of fat in the body has an important effect on one’s blood pressure. Upper body fat makes a person more likely to have

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high blood pressure than lower body fat. An accumulation of fat results in the release of fatty acids into veins which causes an excess of hepatic synthesis of triglycerides, insulin resistance and hyperinsulinemia.

Arthritis

Arthritis is also another health risk that is associated with obesity. The over weight problem that is caused by obesity starts to wear out the joints and this causes a decrease in mobility. The muscles in the body known as skeletal muscles are weakened and reduced in volume turning them into a muscular hypotrophy. Also, excess weight is a major predictor of osteoarthritis of the knee.

Skin

A reaction to obesity is the irritations of the skin of an obese person. The skin is composed of elastine, that gives elasticity and lets fat excess to be deposited there. However this elasticity has a limit and the tissue begins to stretch and break. Stretch marks appear from the

breakage of the skin. They are changes in the endocrine system, in the central sweat and sebaceous glands. Bigger growths of hair in many areas of the body is an result of this. This is known as hirsutism. Sweating increases and boils appear in the fold of skin. Fungus also develops in these folds of skin.

Psychological and Social Effects

Probably the most severe effect of obesity is Psychological and social effects. One of the most painful aspects of obesity may be the emotional suffering it causes. American society places great emphasis on physical appearance, often equating attractiveness with slimness,

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especially in women. The messages, intended or not, make overweight people feel unattractive.

Many people assume that obese people are gluttonous, lazy, or both. Obese people often face prejudice or discrimination at work, at school, while looking for a job, and in other social situations. Other common feelings include: rejection, shame ,and/or depression

TreatmentThe best way to affect the occurrence of obesity is to prevent it. In the past, treating childhood obesity was done unsuccessfully through strict dieting and exercise. But now a family-based approach is being introduced. These programs are more successful because they maintain or slowly help a child lose weight as he/she grows (Mellin, 1993).

These program focus on the entire family, promoting physical and emotional well being and not dieting. An interdisciplinary team of health professionals provides care. They first do a biopsychosocial assessment to see if there are any medical or psychosocial problems, they then address the symptoms of obesity and the causes of the weight gain (Mellin, 1993). It is important to involve the entire family in treating this problem.

Another way to help your child is to be a good role model, children are very aware of what their parents eat and how much or little they exercise (Goss, 1999). You can also go to the supermarket with your child and learn to read the food labels together. Create a healthy recipe and make it. Also have meals together as many times as possible during the week (Levine,1999).Goals

Goals should be set concerning weight loss, start off small, so your child does not become discouraged. The child should keep a record of all the food eaten to aid in weight loss, this makes them become conscious of his/her eating and exercise habits. (Moran, 1999) At dinner, parents should make a meal that the child likes, but if it is high in fat and/or calories only prepare one serving of it (Levine, 1999). Meals should be oriented toward a healthy diet with 30% fat calories or less (Moran, 1999). Parents should also only offer snacks when the child is hungry. Make healthy snacks, such as fresh fruit, raw vegetables, cheese and crackers, or peanut butter on crackers. Keep water, fresh fruits, containers of baby carrots and celery, in the refrigerator, also have boxes of raisons handy. Dilute juices with water by at least half, to make sure that the child intakes the recommended amount of water and cuts down on the calories that are in juices. Small size bottled water make good drinks, they can be put in the child’s lunch box, or be used during or after a child’s exercise (Levine, 1997). Make sure your child’s meal contains most of the food groups. Make soda a treat; encourage your child to drink milk instead (Goss, 1999). Another helpful hint, always remember to schedule meals and snacks.Other Precautions

Do not make the child eat everything on his/her plate (Goss, 1999) this can cause overeating. Food should be used only for nutritional purposes, not for comfort or a reward. Praise your child, verbally, after they make a healthy food choice (Levine, 1997)Participate In Activities

Exercise is needed to loss weight and change body fat into muscle (Moran, 1999). To control a child’s weight, encourage the child to participate in sports for at least a half an hour a day (Levine, 1997). Parents should encourage “active” activities that your child likes such as skateboarding, swimming, riding a bike, jumping rope, hiking, football, basketball, etc. Parents should limit television watching and encourage physical activity (Moran, 1997).

Overall, a parent should watch their child’s diet. If obesity is in the family, parents should pay particular attention to their child’s lifestyle so that in the future the child won’t face any life

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threatening health conditions. Childhood obesity is not a joke, it is now considered to be an epidemic, and an ongoing problem in today’s society.

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