

Childhood Obesity

Childhood obesity is increasing all over the world. This is a worrying problem as, over the past twenty to thirty years, the number of obese children has doubled. In the UAE, twenty six percent of children are obese, just below the international average of thirty percent. Obesity has no respect for gender or race and is defined as the build up of fat in the body to the extent that there are associated health risks. This is an important issue for that reason as, millions of children, all over the world, could face a future riddled with health problems. This essay will examine the problem of childhood obesity and offer some solutions.

Childhood obesity has several causes. One of the main reasons is inactivity, made worse by the advances in technology. For example, nowadays, it is possible to watch TV around the clock and many channels are dedicated to children's' programmes. Some research shows that just under fifty percent of children aged between eight and sixteen watch five hours of TV every day (Torgan, 2002). The research also shows a link between the two, meaning that the children who watch most TV tend to have the highest levels of obesity. Another problem is that school sports programmes have declined, resulting in even less activity among young people. Junk food is another factor in the problem of childhood obesity. Over time diets have changed, with fast food becoming popular and easy to find. Unfortunately, if children learn bad eating habits early on in their lives, they tend to carry these habits into their adult lives. An additional factor is genetics, as is the case in the UAE, where some families have a history of obesity, however, the main causes are related to diet and exercise.

Obesity is measured by calculating a person's body mass index (BMI). If the amount of body fat is greater than thirty, an individual is labelled as being obese and faces a number of potential health issues. These include high cholesterol and high

blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease (KidsHealth, n.d.). In addition, obese children may develop other problems such as, Type 2 Diabetes, asthma and bone disorders. They may also have difficulty with breathing and this can cause sleep problems too, which may, in turn, affect performance at school because of memory lapses. Physical health is not the only issue. Obese children may also suffer psychological problems such as, depression and low self-esteem. Sadly, they may also become victims of bullies at school.

The solution to childhood obesity is to address the issues of exercise and diet. Children should be encouraged, by both parents and schools, to take part in physical exercise. This can be as simple as playing with friends rather than watching TV or playing on the computer. On the subject of diet, parents should teach their children healthy eating habits at an early age and discourage them from eating too much fast food. As an alternative to junk food they should offer healthy options with low fat levels, but should never put their child on a diet unless authorised by a doctor (Torgan, 2002). Any changes in diet should be introduced gradually to be effective and, more importantly, safe.

This essay has examined the problem of childhood obesity and presented some possible solutions. It has shown how obesity is increasing in children because of a lack of exercise, poor dietary habits and, in some cases, genetics. The essay also discussed how obesity can cause many health problems, such as diabetes and heart disease. Solutions to the problem include being more active and developing healthy eating habits, both the responsibility of parents and schools. In conclusion, it is clear that childhood obesity is a problem that can be prevented quite easily in most cases. If it is not dealt with, today's generations face a dismal future of poor health and possibly psychological disorders.