

The Implications of American Culture on Obesity.

According to Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, in the year 2030, many American states will have approached over 60% of their population qualifying as obese. Over the past 40 years, obesity has become increasingly common amongst the average American. Obesity has a multitude of negative impacts on the human body from heart diseases and diabetes to a range of cancers. With a majority of Americans now dying from heart disease, the cardiac implications of obesity, which effectively lead to a shortened life span, have become a dire public health concern. The problem has become so widespread that even the life expectancy of Americans has begun to decrease. According to the National Center for Health Statistics between 2018 and 2020 Americans' life expectancy decreased by 1.9 years as a result of obesity. The culture of Americans is at large put to blame for obesity's growing trend. American culture promotes obesity through the advancement of large portions of food, less time being taken to prepare meals, and too much screen exposure. These practices have become defining characteristics of American culture. Over the last 40 years, American cuisine has been corrupted with delicious foods such as Oreos, soft drinks, and Doritos. While they may taste great, they offer little nutritional value with massive amounts of calories. Many of these treats have become part of the everyday American diet and when combined with our culture promoting unhealthy habits, will prove to be detrimental to the future of our nation.

A large part of our American culture is the large portions that are constantly being promoted. In today's world, lines of fast-food franchises with all-you-can-eat buffets and drive-throughs scatter our hometowns and highways. Our culture promotes extremely large

proportions through singular foods that are equivalent to the number of calories a person should

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be consuming in the caloric total of one day. The 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend eating only 2000- 2500 calories per day for an average American. One of the fastest-growing fast-food chains in the south, Whataburger, offers a double meat cheeseburger that is almost 900 calories alone. When coupled with french fries and a large soda, the meal can exceed 1570 calories. The cheeseburger treat now accounts for over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the number of calories a female should be consuming daily, meaning the other meals will be largely converted to fat. "Value meals" or large quantities of food for a cheap price are abundant in food outlets all over the states. For example, 7-Eleven's Double Gulp which offers up to 64 ounces of soda (around 700 calories), and McDonald's making "super-size it" an option. Losing weight in this kind of environment would be extremely difficult. As put by Kelly Brownell, Ph.D., at APA's 2001 Annual Convention, "The problem isn't so much people's lack of self-control, " he said. It's a "toxic food environment." According to a study by The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, "Larger portions led to greater energy intake regardless of the serving method and subject characteristics. Portion size is a modifiable determinant of energy intake that should be addressed in connection with the prevention and treatment of obesity." Essentially, people will eat more if given more. Similar conclusions were drawn by the Contextual Influences on Eating Behaviors: Heuristic Processing and Dietary Choices in the US national library of medicine. They found that serving meals that aren't consistent in size with national dietary guidelines could promote obesity. They explain that the human body fails to let the consumer know when to stop consuming, meaning when served too large of a portion, people will tend to eat more than they should or rather as much as they think they are eating. These findings are concerning when combined with

the American culture that promotes huge proportions.

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Another cultural aspect that encourages obesity in America is meal prep time that is taken in the kitchen. Eating meals made fresh at home correlates with better dietary quality and lower adiposity (body fat). According to a study by Susanna Mills at the Institute of health & society at Newcastle University, "Eating home-cooked meals more frequently was associated with greater adherence to DASH and Mediterranean diets, greater fruit and vegetable intakes, and higher plasma vitamin C". She then further explains how people who eat home-cooked meals more than five times, compared with less than three times per week, consumed 62.3 g more fruit and 97.8 g more vegetables daily. Susanna states, "More frequent consumption of home-cooked meals was associated with a greater likelihood of having normal range BMI and normal percentage body fat." Another aspect in regards to the changing amount of time spent preparing meals has to do with two-income households in particular. In 1965, mothers would spend upwards of 2 hours cooking, however in today's America, the average person only spends 37 minutes preparing a meal. When both parents are now working busy schedules, finding time to prepare a nutritious meal can be exceedingly difficult. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 76% of mothers with a child between the ages of 6 and 17 work outside the home, which would further explain the decreasing amount of time spent on meal prep. America's cultural change of spending less time on preparing meals is directly related to obesity rising, and the time spent is only continuing to decrease.

Screen time is also majorly correlated to obesity. According to DataReportal, the average American spends 7 hours and 11 minutes looking at a screen every day. The American ways of spending hours on end staring at screens have been directly linked to obesity. According to a

study by Thomas N. Robinson, from the department of pediatrics at the University of Stanford, screen time motivates obesity through displacing physical activity, increasing energy intake from

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eating while viewing and/or the effects of advertising, and reducing sleep. Thomas also explains how Adolescents who reported watching more television also reported eating a greater number of high-fat foods, fast food, drinking more soft drinks, and consuming fewer fruits and vegetables. While it may be hard to say screen time is the cause of America's obesity epidemic, the increased screen time, especially in children, is directly correlated to obesity and likely plays a substantial role in the promotion of the mechanisms of obesity. In a study led by Steven L. Gortmaker, Ph.D., The Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, a study of 746 children was put together to examine the relation between TV viewing and being overweight. The study estimated that 60% of the overweight children had excess television viewing time as the main culprit of their obesity. The relatively new ways of America's screentime lifestyle change will prove to be damaging to the present and future generations of our public.

In conclusion, obesity has become a rising problem in our nation. While many factors can be put to blame, a change in American culture plays a sure part in it. Through the “normalization,” or advancement of mechanisms such as large portions, less time being taken to prepare meals, and too much screen exposure, our culture is having a detrimental impact on Americans' health through the promotion of obesity.

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