

Colleen Estes

Chandra Cerutti - English 1200

Could Breakfast be the Cure for the Rising Obesity Epidemic?

Obesity is drastically increasing, not only in the United States, but around the entire world. What exactly is obesity? How does it affect people and society? What can be done to slow this life-threatening disease? Many of these questions seem so simple, yet why does obesity continue to rise? There are over 750 million overweight people in the world, and more than 300 million of these are obese (Foreyt 1). The difference between being overweight and obese is simple: a person is considered obese when he or she is thirty pounds over his or her recommended weight (Fackelmann 1). One way to curve this rise in obesity is to eat a healthy breakfast. Eating a healthy breakfast can help a person lose weight, feel better about him or herself, and maintain a healthy body. This paper examines the obesity epidemic in the United States and proposes that a healthy breakfast not only reduces obesity, but also contributes to one's overall health.

Americans are bearing the brunt of this rise in obesity, and many factors such as environment, genes, lifestyle, and nutrition are to blame. According to Cynthia Ogden, "Obesity in American adults has risen to 30.5%, while obesity in teenagers has tripled over the past twenty years" (qtd. in Foreyt). Many overweight people think that they are fat because their parents are fat. These overweight people do not feel that they have control over their weight, but rather that it is predetermined by their genes. According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, if one parent is obese, there is a 50% chance that the children will also be obese. When both parents are overweight, there is an 80% chance that the child will be overweight (1).

While there is a link between genes and obesity, a person's lifestyle can also influence his or her weight. Now with more cars per family, video games, cheap televisions and movies than

ever before, society has shifted from an active lifestyle to a sedentary one. Many children have traded in their baseball glove and teammates for the couch. Having children sit on the couch watching television more, means that the media has a larger impact on everyday life. Over the last few decades, food companies have used television commercials as a marketing ploy to gain more profit. Indeed, studies find that “around 99% of food advertised in children’s television is for fatty, sugary, and salty foods” (Sustain qtd. in Haslam 1). After people see cinnamon rolls, burgers, and desserts advertised by famous actors and actresses, it entices them to eat this type of food on a more consistent basis.

The environment affects obesity rates as well. This is why there is such a direct correlation between parent and child obesity rates. The more time a person spends around obese people, the more likely he or she is to be overweight. People who grow up watching their parents eat Big Macs are much more likely to eat unhealthy foods later in life. It is thought that obesity in children begins between the ages of five and six (Obesity 1). This is when they begin to mimic the behavior of their parents because cognitive connections have started to develop.

Also, a person’s social class can be a determining factor in whether or not he or she is obese. Usually the upper-class citizens have a better education on nutrition and can afford healthy foods. If people have enough money to buy organic fruits and vegetables on a regular basis, they will most likely lead a healthier life than that of a lower-class citizen, who has to resort to eating at a less expensive, fast food chain. McDonald’s is a company widely known for selling unhealthy, half-edible items. One of the worst items that a person can choose for breakfast is the deluxe breakfast. This meal has 1,140 calories, 59 grams of fat, 18 grams of saturated fat, 575 milligrams of cholesterol, and 2090 milligrams of sodium (Magee 1). This is nearly half of the calories suggested for a day, and many times over the suggested amount of

sodium and cholesterol. Choosing to eat unhealthily can have a detrimental influence on the body and mind, regardless of a person's social class, environment, lifestyle, or genes.

While genetics, environment, lifestyle, and social class have an impact on obesity, the single most important reason why obesity continues to rise deals with the lack of nutrition in American diets. Nutrition incorporates the above reasons to explain the rise in obesity. If people are in a bad environment with friends and family members eating junk food all day, then their lifestyle will be negatively affected. Nutrition is the most important areas to focus on in curing this obesity epidemic because food that is put into one's body directly affects one's health. Eating a healthy breakfast is, by far, the most important element in maintaining a nutritious diet. Breakfast has proven to help people lose weight, have better intellectual capacity, become more active, analyze information faster, maintain more energy for a longer period of time, and increase confidence. Although there are a few drawbacks, such as not indulging in a McDonald's cinnamon roll on a regular basis, I guarantee that once people realize the benefits of eating breakfast on a daily basis, they will never skip this meal again.

Breakfast is an extremely important component in maintaining a healthy weight. Breakfast fuels a day, and gets people started off on the right foot. It is important to consume items high in fiber such as oatmeal, strawberries, yogurt, walnuts, and whole-grains because they have a low energy density. This means that there is a gradual release of energy over time, rather than a sudden burst of energy that is common in most sugary foods and sweets (Davis 1). This will give a person more energy for an extended period of time, while also making him or her fuller for longer. According to the American Heart Association, one of the best items to eat for breakfast is an egg. One egg contains 75 calories, 6 grams of protein, and 212 milligrams of cholesterol. While some worry about cholesterol, it has been proven that people can lead a

healthy life if they eat an egg everyday (Zelman 2). Also, eating any type of fruit for breakfast will make a person ready to tackle the day. Fruit is largely made up of water, which hydrates the body and helps to cleanse, detoxify, and eliminate waste from the body. Without fruit, it would be very difficult to get rid of excess waste because there would not be enough fiber to eliminate this waste. A few items to avoid for breakfast include: any fast food, sugary foods, and coffee. Starbucks, Dunkin Donuts, and Folgers have all made millions of dollars on coffee, an item that is both addictive and detrimental to most people's bodies. Coffee can cause many problems, such as a rise in stress hormone levels, peptic ulcers, depression, and even diabetes (Freedman and Barnouin 25). Consuming healthy foods for breakfast can really help make a large impact on your body and mind throughout the day.

Many Americans skip breakfast on a regular basis because they either do not like to eat it, do not have time in the morning, or just forget. It is better to consume any kind of breakfast in the morning rather than no breakfast at all. According to Vivienne Parry, nearly 40% of children skip breakfast in the morning (1). When people do not eat breakfast, they are fasting for about fifteen to twenty hours. This means that they are not producing the enzymes necessary to metabolize fat and lose weight (Davis 1). Waking up fifteen minutes earlier in the morning to cook a healthy breakfast is time worthwhile because of the positive benefactors this meal yields. Eating breakfast will encourage weight loss because it can reduce hunger, which will help a person make better food choices throughout the day. If somebody does not eat breakfast, they will most likely replenish those calories not used at breakfast with a less nutritious alternative.

Another idea behind weight loss and breakfast is that eating breakfast is part of a healthy lifestyle that balances calories with exercise (Zelman 1). When people eat breakfast, they are more likely to exercise throughout the day. When a person exercises, it is thought to reduce the

risk of diabetes by 58%. It is recommended that people exercise at least twenty minutes per day. Lifting weights, aerobic, and anaerobic exercises are all very important components to maintaining a healthy weight. Eating a healthy breakfast helps increase energy throughout the day, which will make it more likely for a person to lead an active lifestyle. A group of researchers studied 2,000 girls aged nine to nineteen. In this study, they found that people who did not eat cereal on a regular basis were 13% more likely to be overweight than those who did eat cereal every day (Davis 1). Here is the bottom line: breakfast is an important component to maintaining a healthy weight.

Breakfast is not only an important way to lose weight, but also to maintain a healthy body. Do you want to get diabetes, dementia, Alzheimer's disease, cancer, heart disease, a stroke, kidney failure, or cardiovascular disease when you get older? A recent study published in neurology reports a link between fat cells and dementia. Adults who had collected belly fat in their 40's were 3.6 times more likely to develop dementia (Fackelmann 4D). If individuals do not eat a nutritious breakfast they will gain fat cells, which may eventually cause a loss of memory. The risk of getting diabetes increases drastically for those people who do not eat a nutritious diet. Diabetes is a chronic disease caused by insulin deficiency from eating unhealthy foods, such as cheese, butter, and chocolate. When there is a deficiency of insulin, the concentration of glucose in the body rises (Hill 1). Insulin is needed to move glucose to the bloodstream where it is converted to energy. Without insulin, the energy is not converted and this results in human body fat. If a person has diabetes, then the risk of obtaining other diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, increases tremendously. Although if healthy foods are consumed, such as whole-grains, fruits, and vegetables a person will significantly decrease the chance of

getting diabetes because the body system will be able to digest the items through natural processes.

Another benefit of eating breakfast includes an increase in intellectual capacity. Americans who eat breakfast in the morning are more likely to have improved attention for a longer time span, quicker and more accurate retrieval of information, fewer errors in problem solving activities, and better concentration on complex tasks (Good 2). One-fourth of the recommended daily allowances, such as protein, Vitamin A, and calcium, come from breakfast (Good 1). Most of these daily allowances are imperative to leading a healthy lifestyle, and just by eating breakfast a person has incorporated a large percentage of these into his or her diet. Incorporating breakfast into a person's daily routine will yield good results throughout the day physically, mentally, and emotionally.

A solution for those millions of people in the United States who do not consume a healthy breakfast: start now. There are a few, very simple ways to incorporate a healthy diet that will help make a person look and feel better. Start by developing a meal plan for the entire day. For those people who do not usually eat breakfast, wake up fifteen minutes earlier to prepare a meal. Cooking an egg with whole-wheat toast or eating whole-grain cereal with skim milk is a great way to start off the day. Making better food selections is imperative to a healthy diet. A choice that people might make while modifying their diet may be what kind of cereal should they eat for breakfast? Whole-grain cereals, such as Raisin Bran, are a much better alternative than sugary cereals such as Lucky Charms. When deciding what type of milk to put on the cereal, opt for the skim milk alternative because it contains less fat than other choices. If a person is buttering their bread, apply low-fat cream cheese as opposed to regular cream cheese.

Another way to refine a person's diet in order to manage the obesity issue is to change the environment in which one eats. Eat outside if the weather is nice, eat with other people known to have good diets, and eat slowly. Eating outside will surround a person with fresh air, which may inspire them to become more active. Eating slow can help a person improve digestion, lose weight, choose better foods, and become more social. Eating is usually done in a group, and is considered a form of entertainment. If individuals eat slower, then they will be able to spend more time connecting with friends and family members. It takes twenty minutes for the stomach to produce the hormones that tell the body it is full. Becoming full is a complex process that combines the number of times a person chews, the time spent eating, the look of the food on the plate, and the actual amount of food consumed (Stibich 1). Therefore, if individuals eat slower they will become full at a faster rate, which will cause them to eat less. It is more appealing to eat foods that taste better for longer. Natural foods, such as strawberries, have a prolonged taste in comparison to processed foods, such as cookies or potato chips. Changing the environment in a positive way will drastically lead to better health choices for breakfast.

In conclusion, according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, there are over 300,000 deaths per year from obesity, and it is costing our nation around \$100 billion dollars per year (Obesity 1). Is obesity really worth all of this? Many negative effects stem from this obesity epidemic, and it is continuing to get worse with time. The solution to this obesity problem is to incorporate a healthy breakfast into everyday life. There are so many physical, mental, and emotional benefits that it will be sure to help solve this problem with time.

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