

Information Sheet - Institute of Welfare

Obesity

In 1980, less than 10% people in Britain were obese. Twenty years on, and its 20%. And that is just those at the extreme end of being overweight – those who qualify as obese. Many more have less serious weight problems. Nearly two thirds of men and over half of women in England are now overweight or obese.

These statistics are alarming because being overweight, and especially being obese, increases our risk of many health problems:-

Two types of diabetes	High blood pressure
Heart disease	Gallstones
Certain cancers	Fatty liver
Stroke	Infertility
Back and joint pain	Breathlessness
Osteoarthritis	Depression
Snoring	Difficulty sleeping

Being obese is not a cosmetic issue. It can stop us getting the best from life and put our health at serious risk. In fact, a report from the National Audit Office concluded that obesity could shave an average of nine years from our lifespan.

People come up with many reasons for being overweight, but the truth is that it is usually down to three reasons:-

- Genes
- Food
- Physical activity

Genes

Some people have a tendency to gain weight easily, whereas others seem to stay the same weight for many years without any conscious effort. These differences may be due to genetic factors. Many genes have been identified that either increase or decrease appetite. This means that some people are more hungry than others, or need to eat more food before they feel full. This increases the chances of overeating and gaining weight.

Food

People who tend to choose foods that are high in fat or contain a lot of energy in just a small portion are more likely to gain weight than people who fill their plates with bulky but low-energy foods.

Many people find themselves turning to food when they are tired, bored or emotional and using food as a quick pick-me-up, even when they are not really hungry.

Physical activity

People who lead an active life are much less likely to gain weight than those who spend most of their day sitting in front of a computer or the TV, or in the car. Regular exercise can help to control your weight and improve fitness too and so reduce your risk of problems such as heart disease and diabetes.

Strategies for controlling your weight

Research has shown that those who are most successful make several small adjustments to their weight and exercise pattern. ` We live in a “quick fix” society but losing and maintaining weight loss is a slow process, ` says Dr Hill chairman of the Association for the Study of Obesity.

Realistic goals

- Take small steps towards greater control of your food intake
- Substitute a piece of fruit for a chocolate biscuit
- Change your choice of food at mealtimes
- Reduce the amount of food you eat outside the home
- Develop a new social life around sports or exercise

Institute of Welfare, PO Box 5570, Stourbridge, DY8 9BA.

Tel: 0800 0 32 37 25

info@instituteofwelfare.co.uk

www.instituteofwelfare.co.uk

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