

Obesity as an Epidemic

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Obesity is a broad term that is closely related to the state of being overweight. It is a medical disease and requires to be treated as such. Research has shown that the causes of obesity are linked to eating habits, hormonal imbalance, and psychological states of mind (Luppino, De Wit, & Bouvy, 2010, p. 221). There are a couple of diseases linked to obesity. The excess fat accumulated in the body causes the human organs, such as the heart, to behave in a different manner, leading to diseases such as hypertension. Obesity has a negative impact on the [mortality rate](#) because it reduces life expectancy by -6-14 years (Speakman, 2017, p. 122). Research has shown that “40% of overweight children will continue to have increased weight during adolescence, and 75-80% of obese adolescents will become obese adults” (Lifshitz, 2008, p. 53). The prevalence of obesity is most notable in the adolescent age. On average, obesity is more prevalent in girls than in boys. Thus, medical practitioners consider obesity an epidemic that requires being treated like a disease (Ahranjani, Rashidi, & Karandish, 2007).

Obesity

Obesity is considered an epidemic by medical practitioners because of the health problems it is associated with. Medical research in the treatment of obesity has attributed the causes to hormonal imbalance, stress disorders, and poor eating habits. Thus, the treatment involves psychological counseling, physical exercises, and hormonal medication that are meant to reduce the weight of the patients. Obesity starts at different stages of life, but the most prevalent is the adolescent stage. Obesity is arguably either a disease or a catalyst for the development of diseases.

Obesity Is A Disease

From the definition of obesity, it is “a condition of excess body fat,” that is arbitrarily based on body fat approximation (Ravussin & Swinburn, 1992, p. 1). The Body Mass Index (BMI) determines the fat ratio in a person. The formula employs the formula 30kilograms per meter squared (30kg/m²). Obesity is considered a disease because it has its roots in biological functions and failures.

Obesity And Diabetes

Obesity is a result of excess fat accumulation in the body. The biological reason behind this is the failure of insulin to function. The pancreas releases insulin, which serves to break down fats into simple fatty acids by the body. However, the accumulation of high amounts of fat in the body causes the insulin hormone to fail; “fat accumulation is related to insulin resistance” (Bloomgarden, 2000, p.

1585). Insulin resistance is developed when fat accumulates around the liver, inhibiting the production and secretion of leptin acid, the hormone responsible for the breakdown of fat into fatty acids. Insulin is ineffective in breaking down solid fats. The inhibition of insulin to effectively work leads to Diabetes type 2 disease. Because of the high accumulation of fats in the body and inactive insulin, the body lacks the vital energy that is derived when the insulin converts fatty acids to glucose. Thus, the body functions, such as the pumping of the heart, are inhibited (Bloomgarden, 2000, p. 1586).

Liver And Pancreatic Cancer

The deaths related to obesity vary across the various health issues due to obesity. “More than 90,000 cancer-related deaths per year in the US alone are linked to excess body weight” (Park et al., 2010, p. 197). Due to obesity, fat accumulates in the liver, which has a 24% of causing disease of the liver called Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD). The disease leads to the formation of the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV), which is responsible for the degeneration of the liver (Park et al., 2010, p. 197). HCV presence commences death of the liver by inducing death of the liver cells, hence the cancer of the liver, Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC). Obesity, therefore, is a causative agent of liver cancer; “the greater the degree of host obesity, the faster the tumors grew” (Park et al., 2010, p. 199). The direct link between HCC and obesity hence shows that obesity is a disease that requires treatment.

Obesity, Hypertension, And Heart Disease

Fat in the body accumulates in the body’s vascular channels (veins, arteries, and capillaries) because it leaks into the blood (Bloomgarden, 2000, p. 1589). Fat accumulates on the walls of these vessels and in the chambers of the heart, thereby reducing the efficiency of the pumping of blood in the body. To compensate for this, the heart pumps faster than average. The condition leads to developed heart conditions.

Reduced Life Expectancy

Obesity has adverse effects on the life expectancy of both men and women. On average, obese females lost 7.1 years, while obese males lost 6.7 years. The effects of obesity are farther strained by unhealthy practices such as smoking where the male lost 13.7 years while female smokers lost 13.3 years (Peeters, et al., 2003, p. 24). The causes of the reduced life expectancy are the discussed medical conditions related to obesity such as cardiovascular diseases, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

Depression Causes Obesity

The adolescence stage is mainly the start of obesity, where it starts in overweight and then progresses to obesity in adulthood. "Obesity has been associated with depression, especially in women" (Goodman & Whitacker, 2002, p. 497). Obesity has such a close relationship with depression, "Depressed mood in adolescence is associated with an increased risk for the development and persistence of obesity" (Goodman & Whitacker, 2002, p. 502). The high percentage of depressed adolescents is conclusively a major cause of obesity; of the 9.8% of obese adolescents, 79% are considered depressed (Goodman & Whitacker, 2002, p. 504). Depression is clinically treated by psychologists where medication is prescribed and therapies for the patients organized; hence, obesity is a disease.

Obesity Is Not A Disease

The evidence and claims used to cite obesity as a disease are hypothetical. Rather, obesity is a catalyst, not a disease. No doubt about the health implications possessed by obesity, but it is not the disease. Obesity forms a conducive environment for the development of the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV), but it is not the cause of Hepatocellular Carcinoma (Park et al., 2010, p. 197). These diseases are prevalent in obese people, but they remain the causative agents and not the diseases.

Obesity is linked with genetic inheritance, "Obese parents impose a great risk that their children will be overweight" (Lifshitz, 2008, p. 56). Obesity is, therefore, not a disease but a biological reaction to inherited genes. Also, scientists in biology faculties claim that the body of an animal adapts to the inadequacy of food and nutrients, and with the modern availability of food and less strenuous work, the body accumulates fat as energy reservoirs (Speakman, 2017, p. 122). Hence, obesity is only the body reacting to the environment and genetic computation.

Recommendations

Just like any other disease, obesity requires treatment. However, there remains a challenge in the methods of treatment without harming the health of the patient. Medical practitioners instead advise prevention procedures such as (Lifshitz, 2008, p. 60);

- A monitored gain in weight, especially for children, by doctors and other healthcare providers.
- Food and diet management practices.
- Physical activities should be encouraged.

Treatment of obesity is a challenge, especially in cases where the patient has already developed other health complications as a result of obesity. Different types of medication exist to aid patients in losing weight. However, the use of drugs to cure obesity was stopped because they "generated

undesirable outcomes that resulted in their termination” (Bray, 2004, p. 317). Cognitive treatment is also recommended, especially in cases where depression is the cause of obesity (Goodman & Whitacker, 2002, p. 499). Physical treatment of obesity is hence limited to physical exercises to reduce weight.

Conclusion

Arguably, obesity, being a disease, is justified by its ability to induce other diseases. However, obesity is not directly linked with being a cause of death but is a catalyst for the development of diseases. Obesity is an epidemic that requires medical skills in its prevention and treatment. Medically approved procedures are used in the treatment and prevention of obesity, further justifying the condition as a disease.

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