

The society beyond meat

Demographic and socio-economic changes make it difficult to predict long-term shifts - Part 2

Under pressure to provide healthier meals, McDonald's will gradually implement a program and no longer make less nutritional options available to children. To reduce childhood obesity the overhaul of children nutrition menu options will be completed by 2020, a program executed in conjunction with the former U.S. President Bill Clinton Global Initiative. It is important to address health concerns raised by nutritionists and translate these to contemporary tastes of less fat, sodium and caloric content.

By Henk Hoogenkamp

The obesity levels increased significantly in the 1980s and 1990s, rising to 32% in 2000 and projected 34% in 2014. The obesity numbers are from the National Center for Health Statistics, part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It is based on data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey which is considered the gold standard for evaluating the obesity problem in the US because it is an extensive survey of people whose weight and height are actually measured rather than self-reported. Obesity is no longer just an adult problem. Around 20% of children - nearly one in five four-year-old Americans - are



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Photo: Shineways China

Modern packing technology helps to distribute regional food specialities over a great distance.

now considered obese based on BMI scores. Worse, the obesity rate is sharply higher among Native Americans, Hispanics, and African-Americans. Identifying the scope of the problem across racial or ethnic groups is not a matter of stigmatizing, but rather an attempt to deal with the disparities related to diabetes, hypertension, and other chronic disease. This alarming increase shows every sign of becoming an epidemic. To attack this severe health problem, it is necessary to find a way to reach parents first because obesity prevention must begin early in life. Overweight children are not only at health risk; they also feel targeted at school and in other social settings like Facebook. Parents often feel embarrassed for it is hard to feel proud of their offspring. Large portion sizes in fast food restaurants have a consistent effect in making children and adults eat more than they would if portion sizes were smaller.

Medical professionals agree that obesity is definitely difficult to

treat. Only about 5% of those who go on weight-loss programs maintain that loss after one year. Arguably, it is tougher to maintain weight loss than to initiate weight loss. A diet that is limited to 1,500 calories a day produces short-term weight loss. However, psychological and physiological issues like mood swings and dietary counselling might also influence long-term weight maintenance. Extended human dietary studies have concluded that a moderate fat intake of no more than 30% of calories, a protein intake of about 20% of calories, and the consumption of complex carbohydrates (fruits, vegetables and grains) for the remainder of the diet is optimal in supporting proper weight.

Although obesity is a simplistic phenomenon in biological terms, reversing the obesity avalanche is far more complex. For starters, lifestyle changes need to create the proper environment in which people can maintain higher levels of health. These changes are closely related not only to socio-economic status, family bond,

and social pressure but also to factors such as self-motivation, proper attitude, and psychological make-up, which are all difficult to manage.

There are, of course, genetic roots to obesity. However, sedentary lifestyles and chronic over-eating by the internet generation make it easy to become inactive and stay that way. On top of this, consumption of food is a measure of the good life. Since these factors are hardly disappearing, it is obvious that more serious health problems are yet to come. In fact, the rate of average per capita weight increase in the United Kingdom and other Western European countries is comparable to that in the United States, with a time lag of about 10 to 15 years.

The scope of the problem

The prevalence of obesity increases with age in both men and women, possibly because resting metabolic rates decline with age with the influence of lessened physical

activity like active sports. Furthermore, there are indications that educational achievement is associated with body weight. Well-educated people are more able to prevent excessive weight gain, perhaps because they have a greater understanding of the benefits of diet and exercise. Also, an individual's response to stress may be important. Furthermore, people who adhere to a vegetarian diet usually have a lower body weight compared to those who don't. Regardless of how the risk factors are sorted out, there are some undeniable impacts:

- Obese people experience impairment in the quality of their lives that can impact mental and physical health.
- Obesity is related to numerous chronic and debilitating conditions: coronary artery disease, stroke, hypertension, diabetes T2, gall bladder disease, sleep apnoea, osteoarthritis, joint movements, and several types of cancer.
- Obesity is a significant contributor to ballooning health care costs, directly and indirectly.
- Obesity not only reduces workplace productivity and work participation, but also increases the amount of sick leaves and premature departures from the work force.

Ironically, while people instinctively understand that to reverse obesity they must eat less, most people are unwilling to do it. Successful long-term weight loss is dependent on sustained behavioral changes in terms of food choices and levels of physical activity. Many obese people have lower levels of confidence, which also affects their decision-making in maintaining lasting lifestyle changes.

Food fear

Fear is one of the strongest emotions that many consumers feel toward the food they eat. Undoubtedly, distrust frequently emerges from industrialised or over-processed food and creates a real-time awareness that the food may be playing havoc on the well-being. It is expected that people will eventually get more emotional and passionate about the origin of their food.



Meatfree in all variations are something like a „world food“ today.

Locally grown, no-artificial stuff, antibiotics, as well as hormone-free and fully disclosed calorie information will trigger memories to nostalgic food with an innovative twist. It seems that an emotional connection with food and health preferably in a setting of sustainability will be the new mantra. But then again, the definition of the word „nostalgic“ is a moving target; every new generation has new memories of the food eaten when growing up. For the current fast-food generation this definition is clearly different than the home-cooked food generation of the baby boomers.

Understanding „globesity“

Any calculation of a person's caloric needs must account for activity levels. As recently as 1996, the US surgeon general recommended at least 30 min. of moderate daily activity. However, the latest guidelines recommend that adults and children exercise at least one hour a day with moderately intense activities such as swimming, cycling or simply brisk walking. In reality, these well-intentioned recommendations are impractical, based on the notion that 50% of the US population is totally sedentary. Should health promoters be practical and reach for what is possible, or be dogmatic and preach the unattainable goal of an hour of daily exercise? Exercise levels aside, the answer as to why an alarming number of people in developed countries are overweight or obese is simple: „They eat too much!“ The reasons for which are much more difficult to explain and require input from

the experts.

For example: Obesity is slightly more common in women compared to men, but the percentage of people classified as overweight is higher among men. People who are obese are often depressed, which is especially true for women with a poor body image. Lower educational status, longer television and computer viewing, with less physical activity are all generally and strongly associated with

overweight and obesity. Obviously, a sedentary lifestyle is the single biggest roadblock to furthering the quality of life of society as a whole.

In the United States alone, about 300,000 deaths a year are associated with overweight and obesity. The World Health Organization (WHO) blames processed food for the sharp rise in obesity levels and associated chronic diseases around the globe. No wonder average body weights among Americans are an all-time high; it is estimated that some 120 mill. people fall into the overweight category. Worldwide, the numbers are even more staggering. In 2012, more than 1.8 billion people were classified as overweight or about 25% of the world's population, of which 320 mill. are obese, up from 200 mill. in 1995.

According to the latest 2013 WHO data, the global profile of human diseases is changing from infectious diseases to lifestyle conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, obesity, diabetes, gall bladder disease, osteoporosis, and respiratory disease.



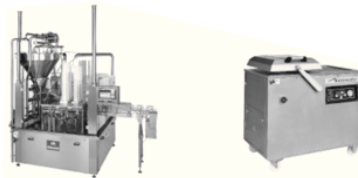
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Western-style formulated hybrid food can be found around the globe.

Such diseases now account for about 60% of the world's 57 mill. major negative impact on the economy. Fat people spend more annual deaths. The overweight and obese population also has a for health care than heavy smokers or drinkers. Undeniably, that

has a major financial impact on medical costs, as well as lost productivity and diminished earnings due to premature death and disability.

In fact, obesity is poised to become a global health disaster, which makes it extremely difficult to bring under control. There is a complicated interaction of protein peptides, hormones, and certain genetic factors that are involved in controlling appetite and hunger. Of course, there are radical methods to control overeating, such as bariatric surgery (also known as stomach stapling). Such procedures can develop serious side effects, like blood clots and internal bleeding. Of the more than 20 mill. obese Americans that are heavy enough to qualify for bariatric surgery, only about 200,000 have the procedure each year.

Both medical professionals and nutritional experts agree that prevention is the most favourable option to battle obesity. That is where plant proteins can

make a significant contribution. These environment-friendly foods are uniquely equipped to pack premium protein quality into foods that still deliver low to medium caloric contributions to the diet to support long-term weight management. Because of the association with fibre, plant protein generally can stimulate satiety much more rapidly as compared to most animal protein formulated foods that often also contain higher levels of fat.



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