

Ending obesity requires astute politicians

By Jeff Davidson

The attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 claimed nearly 3,000 lives, so it's sobering to realize that 2,500 Americans die from cardiovascular disease every day. Most of these deaths can be attributed to sedentary lifestyles, obesity, and poor eating habits. In contemporary America, a staggering 61 percent of all adults are overweight, 27 percent or more are obese, and the numbers are rapidly climbing. In North Carolina, the numbers are slightly worse. As reported on "The People's Pharmacy," at the current rate of population weight gain, 100 percent of the U.S. population will be obese (not simply overweight) in a few decades. The epidemic is here.

It is disheartening to walk through hospital halls and see health care professionals tend to those who need care, but who are themselves 50 to 150 pounds overweight and represent the antithesis of healthiness. I attended an honors education forum at my daughter's school and observed that five of the six special advanced-level teachers were obese — two of them morbidly obese and have to use a cane to simply take a few steps. Yet, all are under the age of 45 and are from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds. My daughter's physical education teacher is 25 pounds overweight. What lessons can these teachers impart to students that speaks louder than their physical condition?

It is illuminating to read account after account of the multitude of studies on obesity currently in progress. Each one seeks to determine the root causes of American obesity at the cellular level, as if prior generations were afflicted in a similar manner, and as if tens of thousands of years of human physiology suddenly needs to be rewritten.

The root cause of obesity in America is that people are consuming too many calories while not exercising enough. They have become sedentary, paying little attention to what they ingest.

The National Association for the Acceptance of Fat People, dogmatically espouses that being large or extra large is okay (for most of the people in this category). Certainly, some people have unique medical circumstances and cannot control their weight. To see the NAAFP champion the cause of largeness and extreme largeness in humanity wherever it exists, however, is folly.

A culture of sloth

We are immersed in a nation where, even if obesity does not yet reign supreme, plumpness prevails. A growing number of cabinet level officers, senators, governors and leaders at all levels of federal, state, and local government are expanding in girth.

Weight charts of what is considered normal for adult men and women have been revised upwards for 32 years running. Today people refer to themselves as king-size, queen size, plus size, big boned, ample, bountiful, rubeenesque, cuddly, or large — everything except heavy, fat, or obese.

Rent a movie from the video store circa 1970, and you will see a different type of American.

When will it all end? Not soon. It took 30 years for the American persona to develop in this way—to regard being heavy as okay, and that health and fitness take a back seat to enjoyment and convenience. It will take 10 to 15 to reverse the trend.

The journey to health and fitness won't be quick or easy. It will start with effective leadership in the White House extending all the way down to the lower levels of leadership. We'll need leaders who are both role models and have the fortitude to use their bully pulpits to cajole the populace for their own good. The slimming of America will require a near-miraculous change of heart among top officers of fast-food corporations that have reaped multi-billion dollar revenue streams for decades by serving foods of questionable nutrition laced

with sugars, salts, and fats.

This change will require a new attitude on the part of parents, both in terms of their own health and fitness, and that of their children. It will require school principals, boards of education, and administrators at every level of education to grasp the firm reality that a child's education is part and parcel of the child's well being. Most importantly, it will require that parents of all sizes and shapes, races and denominations, decide here and now that ensuring and encouraging the health and fitness of each and every member of their family is as important as any other role that they can possibly play as parents.

Jeff is the work/life balance expert for a time-pressed generation. He wrote "Breathing Space" and the "60 Second Procrastinator." Visit www.BreathingSpace.com or call 800.735.1994 for more information.



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