

Warning about obesity

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An important study from the American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates that no less than 40% of the cancers detected in the United States in 2014 were directly linked to excess weight, a number that is higher even than those caused by smoking. Is excess weight becoming the cigarette of the 21st century?

The skyrocketing increase in **body weight** amongst the population that has occurred over the course of the past 30 years represents a public health crisis without precedent.

Being too fat is a physiological state that is completely abnormal, which provokes a major derangement in the equilibrium of the body and favors the development of an ensemble of chronic diseases, increasing the risk of premature death.

The prime culprit for this explosion of obesity which is ravaging the planet is the ready availability of inexpensive foods, overloaded with sugar and fat, and promoted with the help of noisy, incessant publicity campaigns.

Every country, without exception, which has accepted the industrial processing of food is experiencing this current, rapid increase in the body weight of their population which is accompanied by an increased incidence of several chronic diseases.

The multinationals which make these products tend to shrug off responsibility for them by saying that excess consumption is a matter of individual choice and that one can avoid excess weight by simply being more active; this is wrong because it is practically impossible to “burn” the energy contained in most of these processed products (to burn off the 1000 calories in a simple fast food trio, consumed in a few minutes at most, one must run for more than 90 minutes at a fast pace). Obesity was quite rare before the arrival of these processed products, particularly those of the fast food industry, and there is no longer any doubt that it is excessive consumption of these products which is largely responsible for the current epidemic of obesity.

MORE CANCERS

Beyond being an important risk factor for cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, excess fat acts like a fuel in stimulating the growth of cancerous cells. This role is particularly well illustrated by the results of a study performed by the American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) which showed that excess weight increased the risk for thirteen types of cancers, including those of the esophagus, thyroid, gall bladder, stomach, breast (post-menopause), liver, pancreas, kidney, ovaries, uterus, colon and rectum.



The data are enough to make your head swim: of the approximately 630,000 cancers diagnosed in 2014 within the U.S., about 40% were linked to excess weight, a proportion which even reached 55% in women¹. These statistics are even more alarming because excess weight is becoming the norm amongst Americans, with 33% of the adult population being overweight and 38% being actually obese.

In total, 71% of the population present excess body weight and are thus at high risk of developing a cancer.

ACTING RAPIDLY

However, despite the well-documented dangers of being overweight, our society remains stunningly passive when faced with the dazzling rise in excess weight and obesity which affects the population overall, including children and adolescents. This attitude is in several ways similar to that which prevailed 40 years ago about tobacco.

TOBACCO

We had already known at that time that smoking dramatically (~40x) increased the risk of lung cancer, and several scientists had already begun to sound the alarm about the dangers associated with this awful habit. It was not until after a long battle over several decades that these harmful products were banned in public spaces and the number of smokers finally began to decline.

The scientific data concerning the catastrophic effects of obesity on health are actually just as robust as those which existed at that earlier time regarding the dangers of smoking. Must we also have to wait as long to react?

⁽¹⁾ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cancers Associated with Overweight and Obesity Make up 40 percent of Cancers Diagnosed in the United States. Published online October 03, 2017. <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2017/p1003-vs-cancer-obesity.html>