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# Causes Of Obesity Among Children In The United States

In the recent past the issue of obesity among children has become an alarming health problem in the United States. According to a 1999-2002 survey undertaken by NHANES, approximately 15% of persons aged 7-20 are overweight. Obesity is a significant problem among children since it is acknowledged as one of the leading causes of heart diseases such as heart attack and other health related diseases such as diabetes. There are a variety of factors which influence the instance of obesity in the United States ranging from advertising and marketing, genetics, socio economic status and race, physical inactivity, sedentary behavior, and eating habits and nutrition.

## Eating Habits and Nutrition

Research data suggests that there have been modifications in eating and nutritional habits which have greatly influenced obesity. Data has shown that nowadays children not only tend to eat relatively more junk food as compared to ten years ago, but they also eat away from home thereby consuming more processed foods which lead to increased obesity (Enns et al., 2003). Studies conducted over the course of the last decade have shown a tendency by young people to consume snacks and processed foods such as chicken and biscuits instead of healthy foods such as milk and fruit, consumption of which has dropped significantly. The fact of eating away from home is correlated to the incidence of obesity since many children who eat away from home tend to eat fast foods, which are rich in fats, salt and sugar in unhealthy amounts.

## Sedentary Behavior and Physical Inactivity

The research has indicated that in the recent past there has been an increase in sedentary lifestyles and physical inactivity. Sedentary lifestyles and physical inactivity have a direct connection with increase in obesity since they result to less consumption of energy. Children in today's society are not involved in vigorous activity being more involved in activities such as surfing the web, playing computer games and watching movies; these are the activities which require minimal energy. The studies have established that the physical environment in which the child rises plays a great part in determining obesity (Ashlesha & Roland, 2004). In modern society, increasing urbanization has led to a shrinking of play spaces. The evolution of sprawl is also an important aspect influencing obesity since it reduces the recreational space for children. It also leads to the increased use of vehicles for schoolchildren which deprives them of necessary walking exercise.

## Race/Ethnicity and Social Economic Status

While the issue of socioeconomic status has a negative correlation with obesity among adults, among children there is a positive correlation between race and obesity. Socioeconomic status only seems to affect children of white racial makeup since studies have not established a positive correlation in children from different socioeconomic status. Thus, for a child who is African American or Latino the incidence of obesity is not determined by socioeconomic status but rather by racial makeup. Moreover, white children who generally come from well-to-do

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families are less likely to be obese as compared to the other American races (Crawford & Wang, 2001). Cultural practices also bring up issues of diets, which influence the eating habits of a child. Issues such as increased income and unhealthy eating habits are established to be responsible for overeating in the United States.

## **Genetics**

The issue of genetics is also another aspect that is important in the determination of the instance of obesity among American children. The studies on genetics have suggested that children usually tend to exhibit body weight similar to their parents. The studies have indicated that up to 70% of body mass index is influenced by genetics (Bouchard et al., 2003). While there has been established a correlation between obesity and genetics, the research has yet to isolate a specific gene that transmits obesity to children. Obesity is a result of behavioral and environmental issues in most instances. However, genetics may also not be particularly useful in explaining the recent surge in obesity among American children. It is not practical to make an argument that American population has developed the gene for obesity in the span of just over two decades.

## **Marketing and Advertising**

It has to be asserted that the media plays a great role in influencing the lifestyles of people. The issue of advertising and marketing is thus one area which has been blamed a lot for the increase in obesity. The media is blamed for increased marketing and advertising of junk foods which are specifically targeted towards children. It has been estimated that the number of commercials watched in the 2010 has doubled in 2011. Children are also deemed to be more susceptible to advertising as opposed to adults. Additionally, approximately 90% of advertisements intended for children are advertisements of junk food. Several studies conducted have established that children who watched TV adverts marketing fast food were more likely to desire those foods and also tended to eat more food as opposed to the control group (Halford et al., 2011).

## **Conclusion**

There are a number of issues which affect the instance of obesity among children in the United States. While there are factors such as advertising, behavior and lifestyles, and nutrition which may be changed, there are other aspects such as genetics and racial makeup which cannot be influenced. In order to effectively deal with the issue of obesity, it is important to take all these aspects into consideration. For aspects which cannot be altered it is important to mitigate them through a manipulation of other influencing factors. Obesity is obviously an alarming issue nowadays which has to be taken under control if the United States wants to have a healthy population.