

Childhood Obesity: Global Public Health Crisis

Did you know that more than 340 million children were obese or overweight in 2016? In total, from 1975 to 2016, obesity almost tripled! In most of the world, being overweight and obese kills more people than being underweight. Kids all over the globe are getting larger and larger due to unhealthy diets. Obesity can make children develop diseases, lower their self-esteem, and cause mental health issues. However, there is a realistic solution to this problem.

Being overweight or obese can cause physical health complications. The risk of developing certain diseases is higher. A fatal example is cardiovascular disease. In 2012, it was the leading cause of death. Other non-fatal diseases, such as musculoskeletal ones, make it harder for kids to go places and do activities. Being overweight can even increase the risk of cancer! Most of the time, obesity is a result of eating unhealthy foods that lack nutrients. While kids are eating their meals, the food doesn't give them healthy nutrients and vitamins to make them strong.

Not only does physical health worsen when kids suffer from obesity, but so do mental health and self-esteem. A study published by Strauss R. found that obese children have lower self-esteem than their non-obese counterparts. This can even lead to participating in dangerous activities such as drinking and smoking. Obesity sometimes also has a mental impact on kids, as well. When they get bullied or simply ignored because of their weight, they become unhappy. Sometimes, they even get depressed. Ironically, sometimes, when they get sad or unhappy,

they might try to eat more food to find comfort. Then, instead of eating a healthier diet, they end up eating more unhealthy food. This causes a vicious cycle of gaining weight.

There is a solution, though. It is a bill that states that schools need mandatory healthy lunch options and focuses their physical education on physical fitness. Healthy lunch options help prevent the development of diseases related to obesity, including obesity. According to an article published by the CDC in June 2022, before COVID, almost 20% of all kids were obese –a rate that doubled after the pandemic. This follows a trend found in past studies done by Harvard in January 2012, showing that childhood obesity rates nearly tripled over the past 30 years! By encouraging healthy eating, schools would decrease the rate of obesity and the risk of developing diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular disease later on in life. In the short term, healthy foods can also protect students' immune systems which prevent excessive sicknesses and absences.

For this to work, the schools also need physical fitness. According to the American Fitness Index, published in August 2022, many kids are not getting enough physical activity/PE. There are ways to introduce physical activity as a positive experience by teaching fun ways to stay active. For example, by introducing games and sports to elementary students, they would stay active as well as have fun. This bill would help students make good choices later on in their lives and right now, too.

Obesity and being overweight are big problems in the world because they can cause lower self-esteem and even diseases. These problems are caused by not having enough nutrition in food. My solution is to require schools to serve healthy lunches and more active physical education programs. I hope that one day I can see a world cured of obesity.

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