

Globesity: The Modern Epidemic that is Fast Becoming the Biggest Danger to World Health

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Received: August 02, 2017; **Published:** August 05, 2017

A new epidemic is spreading across the globe but is not caused by any infectious agent. It is an alarming problem related to the excess weight of the population that began in the most developed countries and which now affects poorer countries. The WHO has declared obesity as a global pandemic, called "Globesity" overcoming smoking. "Globesity" is fast becoming more of a problem than famine and under nutrition, and has now reached a point where it is becoming a serious threat to the health of every nation striving for economic development.

Obesity is today one of the most important problems of Public Health. Since the 1980's, the World Health Organization estimates that obesity is a global epidemic, with high prevalence in the First World countries and alarming increase in developing ones, where malnutrition and obesity coexist. The global "fat epidemic" is no longer a problem exclusively for rich countries; many poor nations now face the double threat of some of their citizens being malnourished while others are severely overweight.

Obesity is reaching epidemic proportions worldwide, almost 1500 million adults are overweight and it is estimated that at least 2.6 million people die every year because of it.

Obesity is the most frequent metabolic disease and is the origin of diseases such as metabolic syndrome, hypertension, dyslipidemia and coronary diseases. It is also associated with high levels of cellular oxidative damage. But the repercussions are not only sanitary, since obesity also has important economic repercussions, reason why in countries with a high prevalence of obesity like Mexico or Great Britain, the associated costs are very high. In Mexico [1], the current cost of obesity represents 0.5% of GDP and constitutes 9% of health expenditure. An alarming fact is that almost 10% of premature deaths in Mexicans are related to obesity and the economic cost of these deaths is close to 1400 million dollars. On the other hand, the health cost of overweight in the United Kingdom [2], another of the countries where the prevalence of obesity and overweight is higher, amounts to 6500 million pounds and it is possible that in the next decade reach the 10000 million pounds. We can ask ourselves: what are the causes of this epidemic? The answer is not simple nor is the cause unique. It is known that there is a genetic predisposition and an environmental susceptibility [3] to gain weight that is due to an imbalance between dietary intake and energy expenditure. Furthermore, various structural environmental changes that have occurred since the 1980's have created an obesogenic environment with abundance of high-caloric density, low-quality food and under activity.

A recent study by the World Health Organization [4] shows that overweight is progressively increasing in different countries, whether these are considered rich or less rich countries. In more than 80% of the 69 countries analyzed, it was seen that the excess weight of the population increased in parallel with the increase in food energy supply that had been established since the 1970s. In two out of three countries studied the increase in food availability could explain the increase in the prevalence of overweight observed. In the period covered by this study (from the beginning of the 1970s to 2010) there have also been other changes in society that may be related to this increase in the number of overweight people, among them we can highlight the increase in Urbanization, the greater dependence of motor vehicles and the increase of sedentary jobs. Although the economic and technological changes mentioned are among the root causes

of this epidemic, it is equally true that the absence or almost absence of economic policies to prevent obesity has not helped to stop this problem. The creation of special taxes on foods with lower nutritional value could encourage people to adopt healthier diets, along the same line inscribes the possible aid to the consumption of healthier foods, either by subsidies or by lowering prices at the points of purchase [5]. In any case, the implementation of these measures would improve the situation, but it certainly would not end the problem.

“Globesity” is occurring because today’s society has replaced healthy food practices of previous decades with less healthy ones, as the greater development of countries has been accompanied by greater pockets of poverty. Excess fat is therefore the result of globalization and modernity. The solution for “globalization” will be difficult and slow and will be marked by a return to healthy food practices of the last century.

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Volume 1 Issue 2 August 2017

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