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Top 3 Personal Nutrition Strategies to Tackle the Growing Obesity Problem

By Andrea Holwegner BSc, RD

Tell me about the new study that was just released about worldwide obesity statistics?

According to a new study in the Lancet* the number of overweight or obese individuals worldwide increased from 29% to 37% for men and 30% to 38% for women from 1980 to 2013.

Approximately 23% of children and adolescents in developed countries are overweight or obese (approximately 13% of boys and girls in developing countries).

While Canada obesity rates are lower than in the USA, they are not lower by very much. In Canada nearly 65% of men and 49% of women are overweight or obese. For boys under 20 years of age 25% are overweight and 10% are considered obese. For girls under 20 years of age 22% are overweight and 9% are considered obese.



Were any of the countries studied successful at reducing obesity?

None of the 188 countries studied actually experienced a decline in obesity or has experienced a national success story to help solve this global health challenge. This is indeed disheartening. While massive policy, government and food industry changes need to be addressed to truly begin to tackle obesity, so do our personal lifestyle habits.

What is one of the most common misconceptions about our body weight?

Anyone that simplifies the notion that your weight is a reflection of calories in versus calories out is simply oversimplifying the science of the human body. Your body weight is a reflection of a complex mix of factors above and beyond your food and physical activity levels. Also important are genetics, family history, age, gender, body composition, sleep habits, stress levels and more. Remember that some of these factors we can change while others we have little control over.

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Dr. Arya Sharma who is a leading obesity researcher and founder of the Canadian Obesity Network suggests one of the first things to focus on is setting the goal to stop further weight gain rather than focus on losing weight. This is itself a huge success, must result in significant changes and a realistic non-shaming way to focus on weight management

What can I do about my eating habits to help prevent further weight gain?

Having worked with many clients struggling with their weight here are the top 3 things to consider about nutrition for weight management:

1. Do it your way

While I certainly have opinions about what I would like to see people eating, one thing that I know with certainty is that you must do it your way. If you are overweight, there is not one way to prevent further weight gain and weight loss.

Design a plan that considers reducing your overall calorie intake that also considers health and enjoyment. Regardless if you are a vegetarian, carb-junkie or “meat-atarian,” all diets that result in a calorie deficit will help you prevent further weight gain. Rather than doing an extreme lifestyle makeover what if each time you ate calorically dense foods you simply just ate a tiny bit less?

Since we underestimate how much we eat by approximately 20-40% take whatever your current eating plan is and shrink the size of calorie dense foods by one-quarter. For example instead of having 1 cup of rice try 3/4 cup or instead of having 8 ounces of meat have 6 ounces. If the meal now appears too small think about adding more veggies since there are few people I see that couldn't benefit from eating more of these. Also realize that changes like this often are more about training your eyes to get used to the change than training your stomach.

2. Consider “non-negotiable ” foods first

You will not be successful following something that relies on willpower to deny yourself enjoyable soulful fun foods. Anyone can lose weight for a short time but can you sustain it? Your eating plan needs to make sure you have built in opportunities for social fun and yummy food chosen for non-nutrition reasons.

As the chocoholic dietitian you can bet one of my non-negotiable foods is chocolate. I also really enjoy social foodie restaurant meals and wine. I've built a healthy eating plan around these so that it fits my lifestyle and food preferences. Think about how much and how often you need to have your favorite non-negotiable foods. It is not about all or none or good or bad foods. It is about making choices. What is really worth it? Save room for your favorite and choose to make a few sacrifices in places that really are not as important to you.





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3. Cook! Cook! Cook!

While you might be surprised that I am suggesting you spend more time thinking about food if you are overweight, I believe this is one of the single most effective strategies in weight management. If you are spending time shopping, prepping and cooking I know that tasty nourishing food is a priority rather than an afterthought. I also believe that food becomes more satisfying when you use your head, eyes, nose and hands to prepare it instead of ripping open a package or driving through a take-out window and devouring food in minutes.

While cooking might be something you dislike based on a busy schedule, fatigue, stress and feelings of guilt or inadequacy, start small and find a way to build some enjoyment. Take some cooking classes with a family member or friend. You don't need to be a gourmet chef. Start by turning the TV off, putting on some inspiring music and preparing simple quick meals using a basic cookbook or apps (two of my favorites are Mark Bittman's How to Cook Everything app/cookbook or Dietitians of Canada's several cookbooks). Instead of rushing to inhale your meal or eating in front of some sort of technology, sit down at the kitchen table, eat slowly and mindfully savor your bites.

Source: * [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(14\)60460-8/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)60460-8/abstract)

Andrea Holwegner, known as the Chocoholic Dietitian, is founder and president of Health Stand Nutrition Consulting Inc., a member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and a media expert for the Dietitians of Canada. For nutrition counselling information and to sign up for a free monthly newsletter loaded with nutrition tips, recipes and more visit www.healthstandnutrition.com. Twitter @chocoholicRD.

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