

Whitney Wiener, Student Participant  
Schaller-Crestland High School, Iowa

## “Hunger and Obesity in the United States”

Hunger and obesity are two very different conditions that harm millions of people around the world everyday, but is it possible for hunger and obesity to coexist in the same country at the same time? The answer is yes. As a matter of fact, hunger and obesity coexist right here in the United States. Obesity has been declared an epidemic, while hunger has been named America’s “hidden crisis.”

The United States is well known for its obesity problem, and the problem has been addressed by many policymakers and concerned citizens, but has the problem been addressed too late for some people? Hunger, on the other hand, has not been addressed by the government in years. Many policies to help United States citizens receive food assistance are too old and outdated for the year 2005. The United States government contributes millions of dollars and millions of pounds of food to needy Third World countries, but has yet to feed the millions of hungry people right here in the United States.

Many people wonder how obesity and hunger can coexist in the same country, especially the United States. Hunger has always been a problem in the United States, but the government thought that it had the problem solved with the laws and policies that were passed to ensure that all Americans would receive the food that they needed to survive. The problem of hunger has since been ignored by the government, and the upper class citizens who can afford food for their families.

Obesity has also become a growing concern in the United States. In the past twenty years, the numbers of Americans that have been relying on fast food and convenience foods has increased tremendously. The fast food and convenience food has high caloric and fat values that many Americans ignore. Many Americans are also disregarding the recommended amount of exercise they are supposed to get. Many other factors have also contributed to the rise of obesity in the United States.

The hunger and obesity crisis in the United States needs to be solved as soon as possible, so millions of people do not have to suffer anymore. Before the problem can be solved, people need to understand hunger and obesity. The more knowledge people have of hunger and obesity, the better they will be able to solve this horrible problem growing in the United States.

To understand what both problems, people should know their causes. Obesity is caused by a number of factors. A person becomes obese when he or she consumes more calories than burned. (Hate Weight, 2005) Scientist have proven that obesity is caused by many different factors besides just overeating including heredity, environment, psychological factors, age and gender.

Heredity provides one of the key links to obesity. Obesity often runs in families, suggesting a genetic cause, but families still share the same diet and lifestyle habits that could cause members to become obese as well. “One study of adopted children showed that they tended to have a closer weight to their biological parents than their adopted parents. In this case, the person’s genetic makeup had more of an influence on the development of obesity than the environment in the adoptive home.” (Hate Weight, 2005)

Environment is another factor that could contribute to obesity. Environmental factors include what a person eats, physical activity of a person, and lifestyle. A person is more likely to become obese if he or she chooses high caloric, high fat foods and does not exercise regularly, while a person who chooses a healthy diet and exercises regularly is more likely to have a normal weight.

Psychological factors may also cause a person to become overweight. “A person may choose to eat, because he or she is stressed out, angry, or bored.” (Hate Weight, 2005) Over time, a person may think that he or she feels better when he or she eats. Psychological overeating becomes a habit that many Americans have a problem overcoming.

As a person gets older, age can also be a factor in gaining weight. The older a person gets, the faster his or her metabolism slows down, so the body does not burn as many calories as he or she once did. An older person does not require as many calories as he that person did when younger to sustain a healthy body. However, changing a diet as a person gets older is very hard.

Gender also can determine whether or not a person is at risk for obesity. Males have a higher resting metabolic rate than females, so males require more calories to maintain their body weight. Additionally, when women become post-menopausal, their metabolic rate decreases significantly, which is the reason many women start gaining weight after menopause. (Hate Weight, 2005)

Other factors that can cause obesity include some illnesses, medications prescribed by a doctor, and activity level. Some illnesses that increase the risk of obesity are hypothyroidism, depression, and neurological problems that lead to overeating. (Hate Weight, 2005). Certain medications prescribed for seizures and mental illnesses tend to increase appetite and decrease metabolic rate. Steroids and some antidepressants may also cause weight gain. It is also important to be active to lose weight. Without physical activity, the body does not burn as many calories as what a person is consuming.

Hunger, on the other hand, has only one sole cause, which is poverty. A person who lives in poverty cannot acquire adequate housing, medical, or meet daily needs. Many parents who do not make enough money for food skip meals, so their own children can eat. On average, children living in poverty receive one meal a day. Poverty in the United States must be addressed by the government in order for the hunger crisis to be stopped.

The health effects of obesity can be very damaging to a person. Those affects include “premature death, heart disease, heart attack, congestive heart failure, angina, abnormal hearth rhythm, high blood pressure, triglycerides, decreased HDL cholesterol, diabetes, cancers such as colon, gall bladder, prostate, kidney, and breast, sleep apnea, asthma, arthritis, reproductive complications, incontinence, and depression.” (US Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2005) Most health effects are reversible with proper diet and exercise.

Hunger creates problems, too. These health problems include “fatigue, headaches, irritability, inability to concentrate, increased risk of disease, a higher risk of becoming ill, a higher infant mortality rate, stunted growth, nutrient deficiency problems, an increased rate of mental retardation in infants, iron-deficiency anemia, developmental and behavioral problems in children, speeds the onset of degenerative diseases among the elderly, anxiety, and depression.” (FRAC Online, 2005)

Both Hunger and obesity can affect anyone. “In fact, obesity is the second leading cause of preventable death in the United States. Approximately 127 million adults are overweight, while 60 Million are obese. An estimated 65.2 percent of adults are overweight, while 30.5 percent of children are overweight. Approximately 62 percent of adult females are considered overweight, while 57 percent of adult males are considered overweight. An estimated 400,000 deaths per year may be attributable to poor diet and lack of physical activity.” (Obesity In America, 2005) Obesity can affect people from any background--poor, average, or rich households--no one is immune from obesity. In fact, many families who are living in poverty are obese. The foods they consume contain many calories and fats, but the less nutritious food is all that they can afford.

On the other hand, a significant number of people suffer from hunger in the United States. “In 2002, nearly 35 million people, including 13 million children, were suffering from hunger in the United States. Since 1999, hunger has increased three years in a row. Overall, 11.1 percent of households experienced food insecurity or hunger in 2002.” (Walker, 2005) Hungers almost always exist in households where money is scarce. To make these issues more real, consider a typical family scenario.

A typical family in the United States consists of two parents and two children. The family lives in an urbanized area. The father is forty-five years old, and he works as a manager at a department store. He makes around \$30,000 a year. His job is very stressful, because of long nights and the constant worry of managing a successful store. Because of the convenience, he eats out often. His diet consists of many fast foods, and “junk” foods such as chips, candy bars, and soda. He rarely does any physical activity. He is twenty pounds overweight, and has high blood pressure. His doctor emphasizes, that if he does not change his diet and exercise plan, he has a high risk of developing heart problems.

His wife is a forty-two year old nurse. She makes around \$50,000 a year with benefits. She works the night shift. She often works up to four nights a week for twelve hours at a time in the emergency room. Although she doesn’t have a regular exercise routine, her job gives her the ability to always be walking around and moving. She also gets plenty of exercise walking the dog, doing chores, and running errands during the day. Her diet is very healthy and well-balanced. She packs the meals she takes to work and also cooks healthy meals at home. She is considered to have a normal body for her body type.

Their kids are a twelve year old male and a nine year old female, both of whom are overweight. For breakfast, they eat sugary cereals with milk and a glass of juice. At school, they eat a relatively healthy lunch, but they also order a high fat snack off the al-a-carte rack. They also have access to pop, sugary juices, and other drinks in the school’s vending machines. Although their mom always cooks healthy meals for dinner, the children refuse to eat what she cooks, so instead they receive a high calorie and high fat microwavable or oven frozen meal. Exercise is often replaced by watching the television and eating a snack. They are each ten pounds overweight for their body types.

This family needs many changes to their lifestyle. Healthier meals for the children, and restricted access to high fat snacks and meals need to be enforced. The father needs to take a break from work or find a new job, so he isn’t stressed out. He has developed poor eating habits and needs to rethink his life and find out what’s really important to him before his current lifestyle kills him. The family needs to exercise together. If the family set aside a half-hour everyday to exercise together, they would all receive enough exercise to become healthier.

One factor that determines malnourishment in this family is food nutritional quality. Many foods consumed in the United States have terrible nutritional quality. Many people eat fast foods, pre-packaged frozen foods, or snack foods. Many of these foods are high in fat, calories, sugars, and sodium. If a person only eats these foods, then he or she does not receive a well balanced diet. If a person wants to create a healthier diet, then he or she should eat more whole grains, fruits, vegetables, low-fat proteins, and milk products. A person should then reduce the number of high fat foods he or she eats in a day. A person should also start exercising three times a week for thirty minutes to maintain a healthy body weight.

This family receives an average yearly income for an American family. They are able to buy the necessary foods to sustain a healthy body weight, but they choose the wrong kinds of foods. This family has created a lifestyle that will be harmful to the father and children in the near future. The United States

government could assist families like this by creating new policies limiting the amount of high fat foods sold in places such as schools and offices.

This factor's status in the United States population is high. Anyone can afford food that has a high fat content. The situation of food nutritional quality is getting worse. Many people are replacing healthy foods with foods that are harmful to their health. The convenience of fast foods and prepackaged foods is appealing to many Americans because it is fast, easy, and cheap to prepare or attain. This family isn't receiving the proper nutrients to maintain a healthy lifestyle. No one is at a disadvantage when it comes to food nutritional quality, either a person is eating healthy food or he or she is eating unhealthy foods.

Food nutritional quality has many trends. Many people are choosing less nutritious food over healthy foods. If this family learns about the dangers of obesity, then they would probably change what they eat in the course of a day. This trend can be measured in how much food and what type of food this family eats in a particular day. Measuring what a family eats can determine if the family chooses healthier foods over time, or stay in their current lifestyle. Right now, the family is remaining the same. The measurements can later tell if the situation is getting better or worse in the future.

This family needs to improve their nutritional quality immediately. By educating the family about the food they eat and how to eat properly, they would be on a successful road to a healthier lifestyle. The family will be able to prepare healthier meals, and learn how to make the right choice between healthy foods or unhealthy foods. This would benefit the family tremendously, because they will be able to live a healthier life in the future.

I have many recommendations for the hunger and obesity crisis in the United States. The obesity problem needs to be addressed by the United States government as soon as possible. The United States government needs to educate everyone about the dangers of being overweight or obese. The government also needs to set up federally based programs that promote healthy eating and exercise. Schools also need to limit the amount of high fat, and high sugary foods and drinks are available to elementary, middle, and high school students. By promoting healthy snacks and drinks, students will be able to make better decisions when it comes to food.

The hunger crisis also needs to be addressed by the United States government immediately. The United States government has to work to get rid of poverty in order to solve the hunger crisis. The government also needs to emphasize education to ensure that all citizens can have a job to earn a sufficient amount of money to live off. Employment opportunities must be available for everyone in the United States. The United States government also needs to look over current food policies to make sure they are still up to date with the year 2005.

The United States, along with other international governments can also work together in solving the obesity crisis. All the countries should promote healthy eating habits and exercise plans to the citizens living in the country. The nations need to address that obesity is a growing problem, and needs to take action to stop the increase of obesity before more and more people are killed by it. Good eating habits should be a top priority for all countries to promote a healthy lifestyle for its citizens.

The United States and international governments can also work together to solve the hunger crisis. Money and food need to be donated to countries that have a hunger crisis. Food security should be made a top priority to all countries around the world. Governments also need to promote agricultural and small business programs to third world and underdeveloped countries. Countries also need to provide things other than food to the poor such as shelter, education, and health care. Foreign aid also needs to be

distributed to countries acting democratically, so the foreign aid benefits everyone living in the country. The nations also need to locate and distribute food to hungry with timely and efficient methods.

Although hunger and obesity are two very different problems in the United States, the problems need to be solved as soon as possible. Both are problems in the United States, but other countries around the World need to overcome hunger and obesity. Many countries have already taken the necessary steps to help their citizens.

By using foreign aid, many third world countries have been able to feed their citizens. Many other agencies such as the World Bank have also contributed millions of dollars to third world countries to feed the hungry. Countries, such as the United States, are also forgiving debts owed by third world countries, so the government can focus on using their own money for their people.

Hunger in the United States will be solved. Millions of jobs are being created for unemployed people every year, giving them hope that one day they will be able to feed their families and live a life without hunger. The government needs to become more involved with the hunger crisis in America, so the situation can be solved in a timely manner.

Although obesity is a completely different problem than hunger, obesity still affects the same amount of people in the United States, if not more. Government funding must be used to teach people how to live a healthy lifestyle. People need to learn the nutritional content of food that they put into their body. Obesity is a relatively new health condition that can be stopped if people learn about the consequences of what they eat.

Other countries have also been battling with the rise of obesity. Many European and Asian countries have seen a huge rise of the amount of people who are overweight or obese. If foreign countries would band together to research obesity, and teach citizens about obesity, the problem could eventually be solved.

The concern of hunger and obesity will someday diminish from the United States. The government has to become more involved for this problem to be solved. Eventually, people will live in a society where one group of people do not have a growing waist line, while other people do not go to bed hungry. The United States will be victorious in the fight against hunger and obesity.

#### References:

1. FRAC Online. "Hunger in the United States-Health Consequences of Hunger." Accessed on 8/18/2005. <[http://www.frac.org/html/hunger\\_in\\_the\\_us/health.html](http://www.frac.org/html/hunger_in_the_us/health.html)>
2. Obesity In America. "Obesity By The Numbers." Accessed on 8/11/2005. <<http://www.obesityinamerica.org/bythenumbers.htm>>
3. Hate Weight. "Obesity Causes and Statistics." Accessed on 8/11/2005 <[http://www.hateweight.com/causes\\_of\\_obesity.html](http://www.hateweight.com/causes_of_obesity.html)>
4. United States Department of Health and Human Services. "Obesity and Overweight: Health Consequences." Accessed on 8/18/2005. <[http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity/calltoaction/fact\\_consequences.htm](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity/calltoaction/fact_consequences.htm)>
5. Walker, Kathleen C. "Management of Hunger in the United States." Accessed on 8/11/2005. <<http://www.cwru.edu/med/epidbio/mphp439/Hunger.htm>>

