

# Research Report

# MUNISH '12



Please think about the environment and do not print this research report unless absolutely necessary.

<b>Forum</b>	General Assembly Third Committee
<b>Issue:</b>	Tackling the rising problem of obesity
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<b>Position:</b>	Chair of GA3, MUNISH 2012

## Introduction

Jessica is a 7-year old girl. She's not a normal girl: Jessica weighs 222 kilogram's (490 lbs).

As a result of this, she can't walk properly anymore and has to roll over the floor.

Although this true story might seem shocking, Jessica is certainly not the only one with excessive weight problems. In 2008 the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that worldwide approximately 500 million people had a Body Mass Index (BMI, see Definition of Key Terms) of 30 or above, which means that they were considered obese. Over 1.4 billion people are considered overweight: 20% of the total world population. This percentage has never been so high. Worldwide, obesity has doubled since 1980. And it's getting worse every year. In general, now, being overweight or obese kills more people than being underweight. The aim of this research report is to provide you an overview of how obesity occurs, the problems it causes and possible solutions.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Body Mass Index (BMI)

Body Mass Index (BMI) is the most commonly-used formula to indicate human body fat (in kg/m<sup>2</sup>). It is based on an individual's height and weight. For an adult, a normal, healthy, BMI would lie somewhere in between 18.5 and 24.9. For people under 20 another indication is used.

$$BMI = \frac{\text{mass (kg)}}{(\text{height (m)})^2}$$

### Overweight

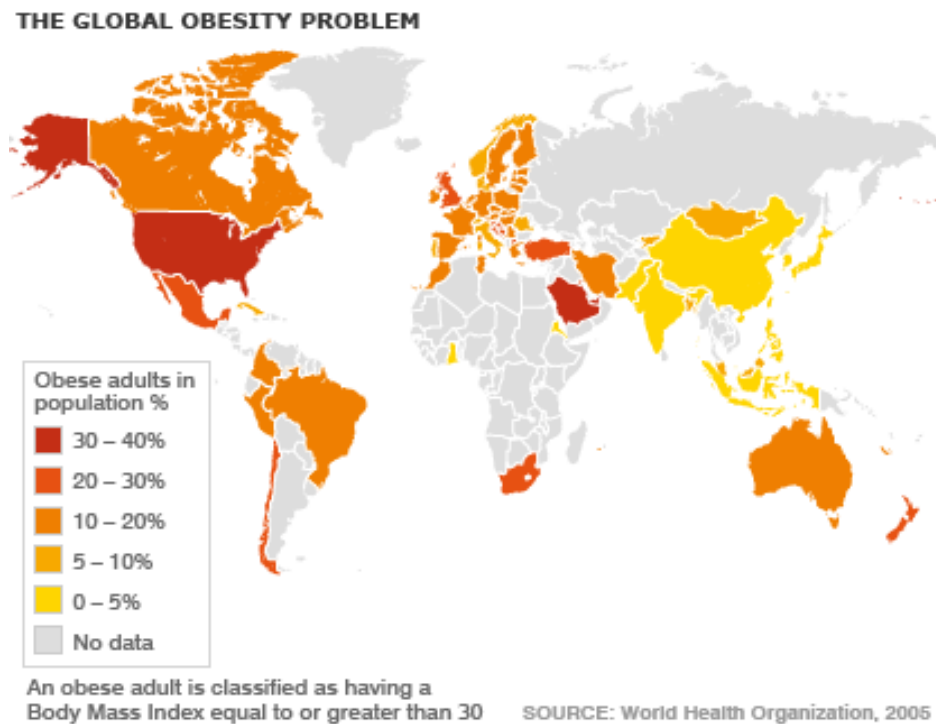
Overweight is usually defined as having more body fat than optimally healthy. When a BMI is between 25 and 29.9, we can say that someone is overweight. Asians, however, are overweight if they have a BMI between 23 and 29.9. You probably already know

this, but the fundamental reason for gaining weight is an energy imbalance between the calories consumed and the calories used by the body. It is important, however, that the body has a minimum amount of fat to function, for as well the inner processes, as the ability to move.

## Obesity

Obesity can be described as an over amount of body fat. It is a dangerous medical condition that has a direct effect on the health of the patient. If your BMI is 30 or higher you're considered obese. With a BMI of 40 or higher someone has extreme, severe or morbid obesity.

## General Overview



Once, obesity was considered a problem that only affected More Economically Developed Countries (MEDC's). Obesity is no longer limited to the developed world; in low- and middle-income countries it is a rising problem as well, especially in urban areas. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, ironically, some developing countries are trying to reduce hunger, but are also facing an increase in the number of obese inhabitants. How is this possible?

Well, it appears that people tend to eat large quantities of cheap food in order to feel full. As a consequence of this, they're missing healthy essentials such as vitamins and minerals. Unfortunately, unhealthy food happens to be much cheaper than fresh healthy

food, such as vegetables. This is because of the fact that unhealthy food can be made by mass-production and is made out of cheap, easy to make essences. Fresh fruit and vegetables are a lot harder to grow and it takes a lot longer before they are ready to be eaten than, for example, cookies. Especially poor people will pick the cheaper products above the more expensive products. Furthermore, many people are still not aware of the effects of the food they eat. Therefore, they make the wrong choices in picking their food. Studies have also shown that, for example, less educated women are twice as likely to become overweight than educated women.

As of the 1960's, obesity started to spread. Before that time, the world faced severe food shortages, think of the two world wars and their aftermath. Also, not as much physical exercise as before was needed, thanks to vehicles like the car. Globally, there has been an increase in food including high proportions of fat, salt and sugar and a reduction in the daily physical activity. Also, in urban areas, people are removed from the traditional food sources, and are therefore depending on an industrial food supply.

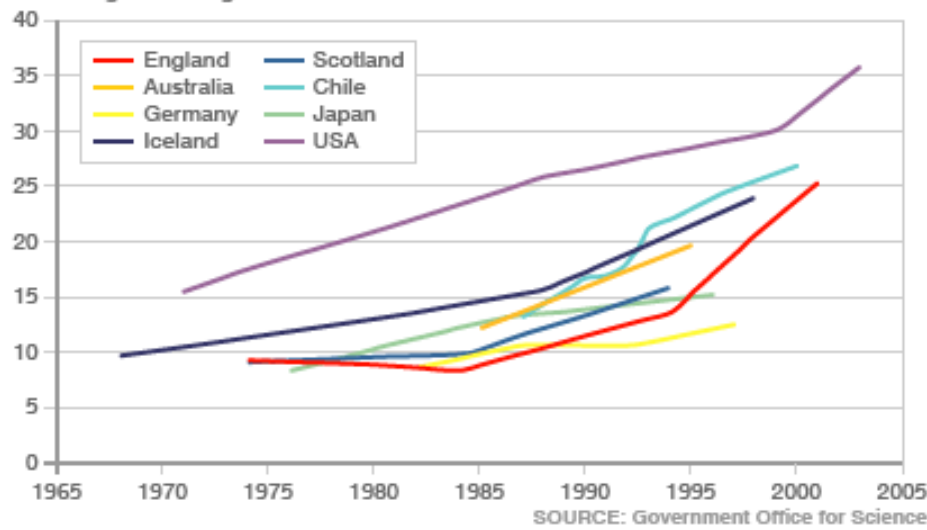
Overweight and obesity are currently ranked fifth on the list of leading risks for deaths worldwide. At least 2.8 million adults die every year because of being overweight or obese. 44% of the cases of diabetes, 23% of the cases of ischemic heart disease and between 7 and 41% of certain cases of cancer are attributable to overweight and obesity. On top of this, people with obesity are likely to die 8 to 10 years earlier than people with a healthy weight.

Even more alarming, is the rise of the number of children with obesity. Over the past 30 years, the occurrence of childhood obesity has tripled. In 2010, more than 40 million children under five were overweight. Close to 35 million overweight children came from developing countries and 8 million from developed countries. It is difficult to measure children that are overweight or obese, as there is no worldwide standard definition of childhood obesity. The problem of children with obesity is very serious. Obese children are often being bullied because of their weight. This will have a large impact on their self-esteem: not only when they are young but also when they are older. Furthermore, if someone has been overweight when he was young, it is very likely that he will stay overweight the rest of his life. Studies have shown that this is a circulation process. When the person gets children himself, he will pass on the unhealthy eating customs to his children. Some people claim that childhood obesity is actually a form of child abuse. In the image below you can see how overweight with children is increasing.



### INCREASING NUMBER OF OVERWEIGHT CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD

Percentage overweight



Obesity also has a major impact on the health sector. It is stated that the annual health care costs in the United States coming from obesity approaches **\$240 billion**. **In LEDC's, the healthcare system already isn't functioning optimally, so imagine how big the pressure on healthcare will be when obesity continues to rise.**

## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

### World Health Organisation (WHO)

The World Health Organisation is a UN agency specialised in international public health. It is responsible for providing leadership on health matters that are affecting the entire world, making a health research agenda, watching health trends and providing technical support to nations.

### United States of America

The USA is currently ranked 1st on the list of countries (not including countries such as Nauru, a country with less than 15,000 inhabitants where almost 95% of the adult population is overweight) with the highest percentage of obesity, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The average body mass globally is 62 kg, but the average North American weighs 80.7kg. Although the USA only makes up five per cent of the world's population, it accounts for almost a third of the world's total weight due to obesity. At this moment two thirds of the USA's population is struggling with overweight, including one third also struggling with obesity.

## World Health Assembly (WHA)

The World Health Assembly is the body of WHO that makes decisions. Delegations from all the WHO Member States are attending its assemblies and it has a specific health agenda prepared by its Executive Board. The main functions of the WHA are: determining the policies of the WHO, appointing the Director-General, supervising financial policies, and reviewing and giving approve for the proposed programme budget. The assembly is held once a year in Geneva, Switzerland.

## Timeline of Events

1948	Establishment of the World Health Organization
1998	First publication of the US Federal guidelines: 'Clinical Guidelines on the Identification, Evaluation, and Treatment of Overweight and Obesity in Adults: The Evidence Report'
2004	Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health adapted by the WHO
October 2011	Worlds first food fat tax introduced by Denmark
May 2012	Most recent World Health Assembly was held

*Obesity is a very modern issue, and not much at a global level has been done. Therefore, the Timeline of Events is quite short.*

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

As already mentioned in the Timeline of Events, in 2004, the WHO adapted the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. It describes the actions that are necessary to support frequent physical activity and healthy diets. It calls upon all people involved to take action at global, regional, and local levels.

From my experience as a Dutch person I can say that I have seen a lot of anti-weight gaining campaigns for example, on the television. It is clear however, that these are not working optimally, as the problem is still rising. Furthermore, not in every country such campaigns are active and also in the countries where the campaigns do exist, not everyone is aware of the effects of unhealthy food.

Some countries have implemented a so-called 'fat-tax' on food with a high amount of fat or sugar. These countries include Denmark, Finland, France, and Hungary. The idea of the fat-tax is to enable governments to use the money gained from the taxes to subsidise healthy food in order to make it more affordable, while the price of the unhealthy food rises. A remarkable thing is that according to a study by the OECD, obesity rates slowed or stopped in England, Italy, Korea, Switzerland and Hungary and grew by only 2 to 3 percent in France and Spain: two countries that implemented the fat-tax are doing better.

## Possible Solutions

So how can overweight and obesity be reduced? One thing is clear: people need to be more aware of the effects unhealthy food has on them. This cannot only be done by including the media, but also by using education. Educating children and adolescents about healthy diets may not lead directly to a reduction of the amount of people struggling with obesity, as parents still do groceries, but in the future it might help when these children do their own groceries. Efforts should also be made by including the parents in providing information about healthy food. Unfortunately, this option is only available for more developed countries, as LEDC's do not often have education or media facilities. Furthermore, people need to be encouraged to engage themselves in regular physical activity. However, sports facilities are expensive and are often not available for the poor. Another option might be altering the food industry by urging them to produce healthier food.

## Appendix or Appendices

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