

Is Our Agriculture Influencing Obesity?

BY DR. MIKE ROSMANN

An article by Bruce M. King in the February-March 2013 issue of The American Psychologist indicates 502 million persons worldwide are obese (i.e., a body mass index greater than 30, calculated by weight in kilograms divided by height in meters, squared). Another billion of the world's population of seven billion people are overweight.

A 2010 survey of 4,111 U.S. residents by Cynthia L. Ogden and her associates (See: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/2253364) reported that 35.7 percent of adults and 16.9 percent of children were obese. Another third of American adults were overweight and 16 percent more children were overweight.

In his popular 2006 book, The Omnivore's Dilemma, Michael Pollan blames the industrial food chain, particularly corn, for influencing American tastes and imparting our diet with too many starches. Corn is part of most dairy products, meats, soft drinks, snacks and many other foods and beverages.

Is the industrial food chain at fault? A 2011 Lancet article about worldwide obesity by Boyd A. Swinburn and his colleagues (See: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21872749) states: "The simultaneous increases in obesity in almost all countries seem to be driven mainly by changes in the global food system, which is producing more processed, affordable and effectively marketed food than ever before."

"This passive overconsumption of energy leading to obesity is a predictable outcome of market economies predicated on consumption-based growth."

Whoa! Is this the whole story? While a good argument can be made that a ready supply of skillfully marketed energy-rich foods contributes to obesity, additional factors are involved.

Our behaviors and genetic make-up also contribute to obesity. Choosing what and how much to consume, as well as exercising to burn calories, are behaviors that are largely under our control.

Despite clever advertisements, we are still in charge of what we eat and drink. A growing number of careful shoppers read labels on processed foods in the grocery stores and request caloric counts in restaurants to select items that are healthy and low in sugars and fats.

Work has become more sedentary as machinery and technology have eased physical labor requirements. We have to replace the physical activity lost because of office-bound work with other ways to use up calories.

Active recreation, working out at the gym or elsewhere and finding ways to make work routines more energy-consuming (e.g., taking the stairs instead of the elevator) can offset low activity work.

It is now common to observe farm residents walking, riding bikes or jogging on countryside roads and trails. A generation ago when we spotted a neighbor walking alongside a road we stopped to offer the neighbor a ride, but no longer.

Our genetics play an important role in obesity. Dr. King's recent article in The American Psychologist states, "The prevalence in obesity in the United States has doubled since 1980."

"The increase in the prevalence of obese and overweight individuals has happened too rapidly for it to be due to an alteration in the genome."

Dr. King suggests our body systems that regulate taste and smell were gradually developed over the preceding two million years and were highly useful to our hunter-gatherer ancestors who relied heavily on these senses to locate food. Like our animal predecessors, much of the food consumed by early humans was found with their noses and tasted to determine its acceptability.

Dr. King added that hunter-gatherers were accustomed to gorging on food when available because they might have to endure periods of deprivation when palatable food could not be found. Accumulating fat for lean periods had survival value.

Agriculture changed our food consumption. When farming and raising livestock began to be undertaken some 15,000 years ago, our diets changed, but not our consumption habits. We were still accustomed to gorging on nutrient-dense foods because they gave us satisfaction.

Raising grains and fattening livestock on pastures gave agrarians ample food and reduced the need to sometimes traverse long distances to find foods. Many of the calories that agriculturalists produced were stored in our bodies as fat, as well as in granaries, livestock and substances such as beer and other alcoholic drinks.

Dr. King elaborates: "Brain reward circuitry that was acquired during evolution to seek out and eat as many nutritionally high-density foods as possible is able to overrule the physiological in-

hibitory mechanisms that were designed to limit meal size and weight gain." Sometimes we eat even when satiated.

In short, we are predisposed to eat and drink more than we need to exist. That doesn't mean we can't control ourselves.

We must be aware how we are inclined by our genes to overly consume food and how we are easily influenced by advertisements that capitalize on both real and imagined tastes and smells.

As highly intelligent and rational beings we have the capacity to make healthy choices about what we consume, how much, and how we use up calories. We are responsible for managing the influence of the industrial food chain on our lives.

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Visiting Hours

How You Can Eat Right Every Day

BY ALYSSA GEHLE

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March is National Nutrition Month(r). The 2013 theme, "Eat Right, Your Way, Every Day," encourages personalized healthy eating styles* and recognizes that food preferences, lifestyle, cultural and ethnic traditions and health concerns all impact individual food choices. Registered dietitians play a critical role in helping people eat right, their way, every day.

EAT RIGHT

Eating right can be difficult and time consuming, but it can be made easier with the help of a registered dietitian. Eating right can boost your energy and increase your overall health. Including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and low-fat dairy in your diet can decrease cholesterol and blood pressure along with aiding in weight loss. Registered dietitians are experts in the field of nutrition and can also help you eat right while managing disease. If you have diabetes,

kidney disease or food allergies, a registered dietitian is the perfect source for information when you're wondering what you can eat and what is healthy for you.

YOUR WAY

To eat right you need to do it your way. That means including foods you love and even a few sweets. When visiting a registered dietitian they can build a plan that includes just that. Not only will you be able to have the foods that you really love, but they can offer advice on how to put a healthy spin on an old favorite. This will increase your ability to stay healthy and still love what you are eating. Sweets are another thing they can build into a healthy meal plan. Overall, a healthy plan starts with you and your preferences. Follow this rule and before you know it, you will be on your way to a healthier lifestyle.

EVERY DAY

Creating a plan that you want to stick to every day can be tough, but the knowledge of

a Registered Dietitian can help you. Your health is the most important factor when it comes to eating right. Registered dietitians are encouraging everyone to Eat Right, Your Way, Every Day. Doing this not only helps come up with a plan that suits you, but it also becomes one that you can continue. A registered dietitian can personalize a plan that fits into your busy life helping you to stay healthy by eating healthy. They can also help you get the answers you need to start and maintain a healthy diet. Registered dietitians are specially trained to work with various diseases along with food allergies and weight loss. They can share tips that can ensure you and your family stays on a healthy path and Eat Right, Your Way, Every Day. Visiting with a registered dietitian is a good place to start your path to a healthier lifestyle. For more information on how to schedule an appointment with Avera Sacred Hospital Dietitians, please call 605-668-8000.

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