

In the Battle of the Bulge, Lifestyle Can't Be Overlooked

Being overweight or obese continues to be linked with being at a higher risk of developing any of a number of chronic diseases. Because obesity intervention can lead to disease prevention, scientific findings about activities that lead to normal body weight are important.

ARS nutritionist Shanthy Bowman recently contributed to a new book on key findings worldwide from the field of obesity research. The book is called “Body Mass Index: New Research,” by Nova Science Publishers. Bowman’s work appears in the chapter “Dietary and Lifestyle Practices of Normal Weight and Overweight U.S. Adults.”

Much of what is known about the link between obesity and health risk stems from a common measurement used to evaluate whether a person is at a healthy or unhealthy weight. Known as body mass index, or BMI, the value is a ratio between weight and height, by gender.

Bowman analyzed existing dietary intake data obtained from more than 8,500 adults through USDA’s national nutrition monitoring system from 1994 to 1996. The survey data was collected by interviewers on 2 nonconsecutive days.

Overall, Bowman found that overweight (having a BMI of 25 and higher) adults not only consumed about 100 more calories a day than normal-weight adults, they also ate most of those extra calories at suppertime. The overweight adults also consumed more total fat and saturated fat.

BMI values are especially useful for predicting or indicating health risks among adults older than 18. People with a high BMI are at increased risk of developing diseases such as type II diabetes, osteoarthritis, gastroesophageal reflux, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, and sleep apnea.

Nearly 60 percent of the overweight adults in the study often ate chicken as fried chicken. And 60 percent also did not always remove the fatty skin when they ate chicken. Says Bowman, “Eating broiled, baked, or stewed chicken, instead of fried chicken will greatly reduce intakes of discretionary calories from fat.”

The study showed that adults who skipped breakfast compensated for the energy shortfall by eating foods high in fat and/or added sugar—but low in micronutrients—throughout the rest of the day. Skipping breakfast did not decrease calorie intake; it was instead linked with high odds of being overweight.

Watching more than 2 hours of television and not exercising were also independently linked with being overweight. Adults who watched more than 2 hours of TV on both survey days were about twice as likely to be overweight as adults who didn’t watch TV on both survey days.

Bowman concludes that for successful weight management, adults should focus on both dietary and lifestyle changes. Eating breakfast, reducing dietary fat, and increasing daily physical activity are appropriate weight control strategies.—By **Rosalie Marion Bliss**, ARS.

This research is part of Human Nutrition, an ARS National Program (#107) described on the World Wide Web at www.nps.ars.usda.gov.

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Nutritionist Shanthy Bowman compares total and saturated fat intakes of overweight and normal-weight adults.

Overweight adults not only consumed about 100 more calories a day than normal-weight adults, they also ate most of those extra calories at suppertime.