



NEWS RELEASE

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Overweight and Obesity Threaten U.S. Health Gains—Part II

Overweight trends are associated with dramatic increases in conditions such as asthma, and in Type 2 diabetes among children according to the Surgeon General's "call to action". In the report, entitled "The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity," Surgeon General Satcher says failure to address overweight and obesity "could wipe out some of the gains we've made in areas such as heart disease, several forms of cancer, and other chronic health problems."

In preparation of the report, Satcher convened a listening session in December 2000 and held a public comment period to gather ideas from clinicians, researchers, consumers and advocates. These sessions generated a number of community-based strategies that were subsequently reviewed for their proven scientific effectiveness. The strategies were organized under the categories of communication, action, research and evaluation (CARE). Those strategies include:

- Ensure daily, quality physical education for all school grades. Currently, only one state in the country -- Illinois -- requires physical education for grades K-12, while only about one in four teenagers nationwide take part in some form of physical education.
- Ensure that more food options that are low in fat and calories, as well as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat or non-fat dairy products, are available on school campuses and at school events. A modest step toward achieving this would be to enforce existing U.S. Department of Agriculture regulations that prohibit serving foods of minimal nutritional value during mealtimes in school food service areas, including in vending machines.
- Make community facilities available for physical activity for all people, including on the weekends.
- Create more opportunities for physical activity at work sites.
- Reduce time spent watching television and in other sedentary behaviors. In 1999, 43 percent of high-school students reported watching two hours of TV or more a day.
- Educate all expectant parents about the benefits of breast-feeding. Studies indicate breast-fed infants may be less likely to become overweight as they grow older.
- Change the perception of obesity so that health becomes the chief concern, not personal appearance.
- Increase research on the behavioral and biological causes of overweight and obesity. Direct research toward prevention and treatment, and toward ethnic/racial health disparities.
- Educate health care providers and health profession students on the prevention and treatment of overweight and obesity across the lifespan.

"Communities can help when it comes to health promotion and disease prevention," Satcher said. "When there are no safe places for children to play, or for adults to walk, jog, or ride a bike, that's a community responsibility. When school lunchrooms or workplace cafeterias don't offer healthy and appealing food choices, that is a community responsibility. When new or expectant parents are not educated about the benefits of breast-feeding, that's a community responsibility. And when we don't require daily physical education in our schools, that is also a community responsibility."

The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity is available at <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity>

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