



healing words

BY MARK W. McCLURE, MD, MEDICAL EDITOR

battle of the bulge

There is an epidemic of obesity in the United States: three quarters of American are overweight and one in three is obese (defined as a body mass index [BMI] greater than 30). Women have achieved gender equality with men in this category.

Although excess calories and inactivity are the root causes of obesity for both sexes, the presentation varies. Men store fat on the surface of the body, whereas women initially store fat internally. In women, fat is initially deposited inside the body and among thousands of areas between muscle cells before surface changes become evident. Around age 30, fat starts to accumulate outside their bodies, particularly on the outside of their thighs and stomachs. Often within a year of its onset, the battle of the bulge is in full swing, even if the same diet and level of activity is maintained.

Unfortunately, excess fat does more than ruin one's waistline. Overweight and obesity are known risk factors for diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, gallbladder disease, stroke, and some types of cancer. Researchers have discovered that fat may induce these chronic diseases by releasing special chemicals called cytokines that increase inflammation in the body.

Obesity has also reached epidemic proportions in children. The incidence of obesity in children ages 12 to 19 years of age has quadrupled since 1976. Roughly 12 percent of Caucasian, 20 percent of African American, and 27 percent of Hispanic children are obese, and the same disturbing trend applies to children between 6 and 11 years of age.

As a consequence, the incidence of non-insulin-dependent diabetes in children is skyrocketing and so is the incidence of lipid abnormalities and hypertension.

The standard American diet (SAD) is partly to blame for the current crisis. Americans typically derive one-third of their calories from junk food—empty calories—that are packed with excess fat, sugar, and salt. Lack of exercise is another contributing factor. A quarter of the U.S. population never exercises. Television and video games have replaced after-dinner walks and outdoor recreational activities.

Although fighting the battle of the bulge can be discouraging, losing even a few pounds can lower the risk for obesity-related chronic diseases. Here are a few simple measures that can help shed unwanted pounds: Eat less food—take smaller portions, chew food completely, and stop eating when you're no longer hungry (instead of when you're full). Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables—at least five servings daily—and limit the consumption of refined foods, especially junk food. Eat like a king in the morning, like a prince at lunch, and like a pauper at dinner. Avoid snacking between meals, particularly at bedtime.

Make a commitment to exercise regularly. Select an exercise that you enjoy and designate at least three days each week as exercise days. Congratulate yourself on successes and be kind to yourself when you fall short of your goal.

Excess fat is one body part that we can trim. **llh**

Dr. McClure, founder of Landmark Urology and Complementary Medicine in Raleigh, is this publication's medical editor. Visit him on the web at www.urolmd.com, or contact his office at (919) 571-4399.