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Letters to the Editor

Obesity Is Not Only an Adult Problem

C. R. Conti: *Clin Cardiol* 2004;27:183–184

To the Editor:

I share the same concern as Conti¹ that obesity is not only an adult problem. He cited the Bogalusa heart study involving a community, Bogalusa in Louisiana, of mixed (black and white) population. But the problem is not restricted to the Americans.

Childhood obesity is also increasing in prevalence in China.² In the most populous country in the world, where lean people used to be the norm,² this trend is alarming. In urban areas in China, the prevalence of childhood obesity increased from 1.5% in 1989 to 12.6% in 1997 and prevalence of overweight children increased from 14.6 to 28.9% in the same period.³ In a more recent study reported from China, the prevalence of overweight children was 27.7% in boys and 14.1% in girls.⁴

Although the cause of childhood obesity could be genetic, the major responsible factors are increased caloric intake and decreased physical activity. Thanks to the efficient advertisements of such fast food giants as McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken, the Chinese children are devouring the Western fast food faster than ever.^{2, 5} On the basis of an 8-province survey, the fat intake of urban Chinese boys aged 12–15 years rose from about 17% of their total energy intake in 1989 to nearly 30% in 1993.⁶ On the other hand, increased physical inactivity also plays a role.⁷ The effect of television viewing on childhood obesity in China has been well documented: each hourly increment of television viewing is associated with a 1–2% increase in the prevalence of pediatric obesity in urban areas in China.⁸

Obese children grow up to be obese adults.² Therefore, to control obesity in the adults, we have to start to control obesity in the children. Conti cited evidence of fatty streaks in the blood vessels of aborted fetuses of mothers who smoked cigarettes during pregnancy.¹ These fetuses, of course, are helpless; but once they are born, it is up to them to do something to prevent themselves from getting fat.

Finally, as Conti said, parents need to be role models.¹ Because parents provide a child's contextual environment, they should be considered key players in interventions aimed at preventing children's weight-related problems.⁹

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