

[IMAGE]

Weight, Activity Statistics Explain America's Weight Problem

By G. Douglas Andersen, DC, DACBSP, CCN

Recently, a [national online news magazine](#) came out with what may be developing into an annual event. For the third straight year, the magazine asked experts to rate diets. In this case, 19 panelists ranked 29 diets for a number of categories including weight loss. Since every diet has supporters and only one can have the highest ranking, this exercise can start as many arguments as ranking the 29 cutest breeds of puppies. After I read what they had to say, rather than getting pulled into a food fight (pun intended), my thoughts centered on why we need so many diets and decided it was time for an obesity update.

Even though the American Medical Association reclassified obesity as a disease during its 2013 annual meeting (more on that next month), America's obesity explosion appears to have leveled off. In fact, the U.S. is no longer the fattest nation on Earth, having just been passed by Mexico. The bad news is that almost seven out of 10 adults in America need to lose weight. (**See Tables 1 and 2.**) The reason is simple – too many calories ingested, too few calories expended.

Table 1: Body-Mass Index Classifications	
Weight Status	BMI
Underweight	Less than 18.5
Normal Weight	18.5-24.9
Overweight	25.0-29.9
Obese Class 1	30.0-34.9
Obese Class 2	35.0-39.9
Obese Class 3	Over 40.0

Body mass index (**BMI**) is a popular way for epidemiologists to classify the weight of large groups of people. BMI is calculated in the following ways: body weight in kilograms divided by the height in meters squared; or body weight in pounds divided by the height in inches, squared and multiplied by 705.

The BMI is fairly accurate for normal people. It is not as accurate for extremely short people or athletic people (heavy exercisers) of normal size, and completely inaccurate for those who are heavily muscled. BMI accuracy improves when used to compare large sample sizes.

Table 2: BMI of American Adults, 1960-2010			
Years	Normal Weight	Overweight / Obese	Underweight
1960-62	51.2%	44.8%	4.0%
1971-74	48.8%	47.7%	3.5%
1976-80	49.6%	47.4%	3.0%
1988-94	41.7%	56.0%	2.3%
1999-2002	32.9%	65.2%	1.9%
2003-2006	31.4%	66.9%	1.7%
2007-2010	29.8%	68.5%	1.7%

I compiled **Table 3** from information provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service division. In a long and complex process, they use a series of inventory measurements, estimates and formulas to calculate the average calories per day Americans consume. This is not an exact science, nor do any of the authors and/or the USDA staff claim otherwise. But it is an excellent tool to compare ourselves with ourselves over time.

Take a look at Table 3 and you will notice Americans went on a 25-year bender from 1975 to 2000. Although I elected to list data at five-year intervals, from 2000 to 2007, America hit a seven-year calorie plateau. From 2008 to 2010, there were slight declines for three straight years – something not seen since 1972 to 1975.

Table 3: Average Calories Per Person, Per Day by Category*							
Year	Meat-Egg-Nut	Dairy	Fruit / Veg	Grains	Added Fats**	Added Sugars**	Calories
2010	544	232	208	596	588	367	2,534
2005	566	232	216	602	588	396	2,601
2000	555	231	228	625	545	415	2,600
1995	532	233	224	593	434	402	2,418
1990	521	236	211	566	410	369	2,313
1985	539	240	211	500	427	352	2,270
1980	518	228	199	459	372	225	2,112
1975	513	233	198	436	351	318	2,048
*From U.S. Department of Agriculture food disappearance data (beginning food stocks – ending stocks + imports – spillage, spoilage, plate waste, misc loss).=							
**Excludes naturally occurring fats and sugars							

If you compare 1975 with 2010, you will see an increase of approximately 484 calories per day, 92 percent of which (about 446 calories) are from grains, added fats and added sugars. The approximate breakdown in terms of calorie source is approximately 237 calories from fats and approximately 209 calories from carbohydrates.

Table 4: U.S. Adults Meeting Guidelines for Muscle Strengthening & Aerobic Activity (2011)*		
	Men	Women
Meet Both	25.0%	17.2%
Meet One	31.5%	31.3%
Meet Neither	43.5%	51.5%

While the anti-fat and anti-carb crowds continue to blame each other for America's weight problem, the data shows that seven out of 10 Americans didn't become overweight from a single macronutrient. Nor will the problem be solved by a single macronutrient. The best chance for success is to tailor a program to fit a person's specific needs. This conflicts with the current model of having people conform to a program.

weight problem - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Insufficient activity is the other major factor in the fattening of America. In 2008, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services published new exercise guidelines. Table 4 shows how many Americans meet the recommendations of 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes of high-intensity aerobic activity and two days a week of strength exercise.

As Table 4 indicates, just over seven out of 10 adults are underactive. And Table 2 shows just under seven out of 10 adults are overweight. That must be a coincidence because "too many bites and too few steps" makes the problem seem too easy.

Dr. G. Douglas Andersen is a sports chiropractor and certified clinical nutritionist who practices in Brea, Calif. He can be contacted with questions and comments via his Web site: www.andersenchiro.com.

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