

REVIEW PAPER

Health policy strategies for the treatment of obesity: a systematic review

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The phenomenon of obesity has nowadays become an epidemic, as it seems to greatly affect the populations of both developed and developing countries. General issues involving the evaluation of the phenomenon, its consequences and the health policies that can be used to confront it, are discussed.

Objectives: The objectives of this paper were to critically discuss and analyze the relation between obesity and major diseases of the western societies such as cancers and diabetes mellitus. Furthermore its aim was to demonstrate the direct relation between various prevention strategies and the reduction of the phenomenon.

Method: An online search in Medline, Pumed and the Cochrane Database of peer-reviewed Systematic Reviews and meta-analysis was conducted. Retrieved studies were screened to meet certain inclusion criteria, i.e. relevance, significant meanings in correspondence with this paper's objectives and of interest to an international health-professional readership.

Results: There is a clear demonstration of the direct relation between obesity and a series of diseases such as cancer, diabetes and coronary disease. Obesity also seems to be directly related to an increased incidence of caesarian sections and gestational diabetes mellitus. Reduced smoking rates during pregnancy and an increased time of breastfeeding seem to have a protective role. The importance of physical training, of a "healthy nutritional model" adopted by the parents, and of the Mediterranean diet are shown to be fundamental in the confrontation of the phenomenon. Additionally, family doctor interventions, cognitive-behavioral therapy and internet-mediated actions seem to sufficiently aid in its prevention.

Conclusion: There is a clear proof that certain primary and secondary prevention strategies along with the the increase of health-concience in communities may lead to the decrease in the rates of obesity and its undoubtedly harmful consequences.

Key words: obesity, overweight, Body Mass Index (B.M.I), interventions, health education, treatment strategies