

Extend Your Listening What's For English?

Obesity

Hello! And welcome back to Extend Your Listening on What's for English Dot Com.

I'm sorry, I've been away for a while. Well, I didn't actually go anywhere. I just stopped updating the blog for a few weeks.

But I'm back now. And with a new topic. The new topic will be HEALTH. Now, health is of course a very big topic and it covers a lot of issues. There are topics I'm interested in, like food and health, exercise, or some health issues that are in the news these days. But there are other issues that I just don't understand well enough to talk about - such as **reforming** health care in the United States. I'm interested in that topic, but it kind of **overwhelms** me. So if there's an issue you'd like me to discuss, feel free to leave a comment and make a request.

So let's talk about today's topic: Obesity.

In your country, have people been getting bigger? Has the average weight of your fellow citizens been increasing? Do you see more fat children, teens and adults than you used to? If so, your country may be seeing an increase in obesity.

Obesity is **on the rise** throughout most of the industrialized world. But the increase in obesity is highest in the United States. And the extreme, unbelievable increase in the weight of Americans is the subject of the graphic I'll be discussing. But obesity is increasing in developing countries, too.



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To reform: improve or fix something that is wrong; change something to be better.

To overwhelm: overpower, to crush or bury. You can be overwhelmed by your problems.

On the rise: increasing

Tragedy: a very sad play or story.

And, frankly, that's a **tragedy** - for while so many people in the world are hungry, so many others are obese. And in many cases, the obese and the chronically hungry live in the very same country.

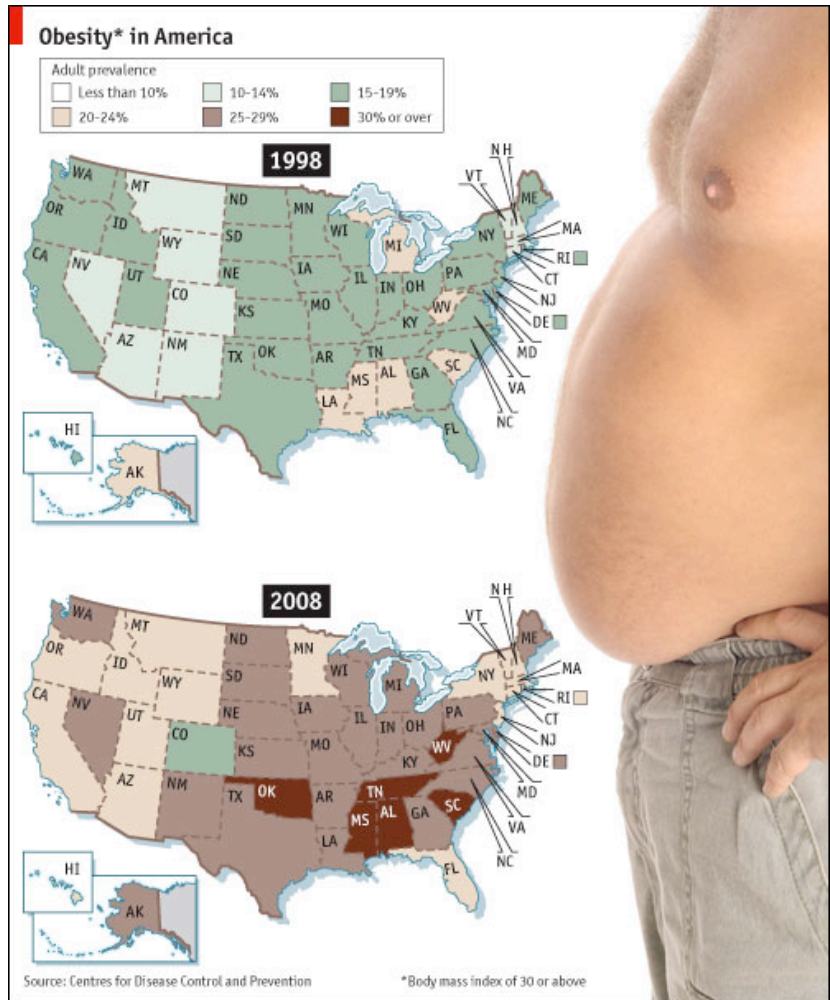
Obesity refers to the condition of having too much body weight, of being too heavy than is good for you, of being, well, too fat. It's a noun. So don't say "I am obesity" or "My brother is obesity." You might be able to say, "my brother suffers from obesity." Obesity is the condition of having all of this extra weight. But you can also use the adjective form, which is "obese." "Obese" can describe a person who is grossly overweight.

You can say, "He hasn't just gained a lot of weight - he's become obese." Or: "The kids in that family are all so obese." Or: "Because of the increase in obese passengers, airlines are having to redesign seats."

Let's take a look at the chart. This appeared in the [Economist](#) on July 13, 2009.

And you can find it on the Economist website in a great feature called, [The Daily Chart](#).

So this chart shows that obesity increased in the United States between 1998 and 2008. In fact, it shows that the incidence or rate of obesity in the US population has risen a lot in these ten years. There are more obese Americans now than ever before. In 1998, most states had an obesity rate of 15 - 19%. That was considered high back then - well - it's not that long ago - just ten years ago. Six states had a lower rate of 10-14%. The highest rate in 1998 was 20 - 24%, and obesity at that rate was found in only 7 states.



Move forward only ten years, and it seems we are in a different country - or a new world. In 2008, only one state, Colorado, has the lowest rate. But the lowest rate in 2008 is 15 - 19% which looked pretty high just ten years earlier. In 2008, there are now 16 states with an obesity rate of 20- 24%. Around 25 states have a rate of 25 - 29%. And remember that 25-29% was a rate that was not even found in 1998. And today in 2008, there are now 6 states where the rate of obesity is over 30%.

This is astounding. It boggles the mind. The color of the map has changed so completely. Some states have jumped two categories. Washington state went from being a green state with 15-19% obesity to grey/brown with 25-29%. And Oklahoma jumped three categories. In 1998, the obesity rate was 15 - 19%. And now Oklahoma is one of the states where the obesity rate is over 30%.

We can talk about this data in so many different ways. Let's talk about causes. People blame a number of causes for this epidemic of obesity. People eat more than they used to. And they exercise less. They drive too much and walk too little. People eat far too much junk food - and drink far, far too much soda. Obviously, sweet soda pop increases the calories people take in daily - but lately some have also been pointing out that diet drinks may be linked to even more obesity. I'm not exactly sure why, but perhaps drinking a diet drink might make the brain crave more calories. So you actually eat more when you drink diet drinks.

In the past... well - maybe throughout most of human history - body weight was associated with wealth. The more physical work you had to do, the thinner you were likely to be. But if you were wealthy and didn't have to work, you could put on the extra weight. And hefty people looked a lot wealthier than people who were not so hefty.

In some countries today, weight is still a sign of wealth. And unfortunately this is not good for their populations as food - especially junk food - gets cheaper and cheaper.

But in the United States, the rate of obesity is highest among the poor. People on low incomes may have to select foods with the highest amount of calories, whereas wealthier people can vary their diets. Poor people may also live in neighborhoods without good supermarkets, and their choices are limited further. Wealthier people in the US have better access to a variety of foods as well as more information about good health and nutrition.

Or do they? I'm afraid these wide, huge increases in obesity rates means that all Americans - no matter where they live or how wealthy they are - are getting larger - and larger - and larger still.

