



Obesity predicted for 40% of America

By Nanci Hellmich, USA TODAY

About 40% of Americans, or 68 million people, will be obese by 2010 if people keep gaining at the current rate, government researchers predict.

About 31% of Americans are now obese, which is defined as roughly 30 or more pounds over a healthy weight.

Scientists with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention present their predictions this week in Fort Lauderdale at the annual meeting of the North American Association for the Study of Obesity, co-sponsored with the American Diabetes Association.

Being overweight increases the risk of diabetes, heart disease, cancer, arthritis and other health problems. Federal officials hoped to decrease obesity in the USA with Healthy People 2010, a national health-promotion and disease-prevention initiative. One major objective is an obesity rate of 15%.

But the trend is headed in the opposite direction. To come up with the latest projections, researchers tracked data from the mid-'70s through 2000 with the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. It is considered the most definitive assessment of Americans' weight.

Obesity is "a complex problem that will require renewed efforts by individuals, health care professionals, communities and policymakers to create a more comprehensive solution," says CDC health economist Larissa Roux.

Another report, released today by the Rand Corp., found that the number of severely obese people (100 or more pounds over a healthy weight) increased from one in 200 in 1986 to one in 50 in 2000. More than 4 million U.S. adults are in this category, says Roland Sturm, a senior economist.

John Foreyt, director of Behavioral Medicine Research Center at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, estimates that almost every American will be overweight or obese by 2040.

A few, possibly 5% to 15%, might be able to maintain a healthy weight, he says.

"But most of us are in trouble," Foreyt says. "We are affected so strongly by the environment — fast food, big portion sizes and the lack of a need to be active — that we are doomed."

Samuel Klein of the North American Association for the Study of Obesity says, "More lives are being lost to obesity than any war or terrorist attack."

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