

Narrator

An epidemic is expanding across America today – its obesity - and no one is immune. The temptation to over-eat is everywhere. This easy availability of food, combined with our sedentary lifestyles, has helped us pack on the pounds. And being fat is literally killing us.

Arthur Agatston, MD, Author, “The South Beach Diet”

“The country is getting fatter and more diabetic, and these are important risk factors for heart attack and stroke.”

Paul Jellinger, MD, American Association of Clinical Endocrinology

“The incidence of diabetes is definitely increasing, we’ve all heard about the epidemic of diabetes, and it parallels very strongly, the epidemic of obesity.”

John Buse, MD, PhD, American Diabetes Assoc., UNC School of Medicine

“When you’re overweight it’s a little bit like having a truck frame you know you’ve got this big body and the cells that make insulin it’s like a sub-compact pancreas for insulin production. It just can’t drive that big truck around. You shrink the truck and the cells that make insulin are enough to keep people from developing diabetes”.

Narrator

Nearly two of three adult Americans are overweight or obese - about 72 million people. And the numbers keep getting worse. But when is a person considered technically obese?

For adults, it comes down to a measure of your height versus your weight known as the Body Mass Index, or BMI.

Here’s an example:

A five foot 9 inch woman who weighed less than 168 pounds would have a BMI less than 25 and be considered as having a healthy weight.

But if she weighed more than 168 pounds her BMI would be greater than 25 and she’d be considered overweight

So if our 5 foot 9 inch woman weighed 203 pounds or more her BMI would be 30 or higher and she’d be considered obese.

You can calculate your own BMI by visiting www.cdc.gov.

Experts think an alarming increase in obesity in children is driven mostly by poor eating habits, and physical inactivity. Over the past 20 years, the proportion of overweight children ages six through 11 has more than doubled, and the rate for kids ages 12 through 19 has tripled.

Cardiologist Dr. Arthur Agatston has made getting healthier foods to children a top priority. The creator of the popular “South Beach Diet” also directs the Agatston Research Foundation, which has launched a study, titled “Healthier Options for Public Schoolchildren.”

Arthur Agatston, MD, Cardiologist, Author, “The South Beach Diet”

“For the first time in fact what we always called adult onset diabetes, now it’s called type two diabetes and we’re seeing it in kids because they’re gaining so much weight often because they’re on a pure fast food diet. And this is the example where they are really while they are over fed and overweight, they’re literally under-nourished. Many behavioral and academic problems that we see in kids are because they’re not getting enough fruits and vegetables.”

Narrator

South Woods Elementary in the rural town of Elkton, Florida is one of the nation’s first Healthier Options schools. The school launched the program after routine screenings showed that the BMI of the kids was sky high and it was putting them at risk.

Brian McElhone, Principal

“We see that every day, how their weight, their appearance, and their general feeling, affects their learning and how they interact with others. One of the positive things that we’ve seen is an increase, not just in the students’ self-esteem, but also in their knowledge of nutrition. And having conversations about it in the cafeteria and in the classroom they’re really starting to take those conversations from school and apply them at home.”

Narrator

Under the Healthier Options program, total fat and saturated fat were reduced and the amount of dietary fiber was increased, for meals and snacks served in the school cafeteria. Each month, a healthy vegetable is highlighted.

Natural Sound

“Boys and girls what kind of bread is this? Whole wheat!”

Narrator

Lessons about nutrition are integrated into the classroom.

Hannah Wilkinson, Nine-Years Old

“I want to start eating healthier because I want to have a healthier body.”

Narrator

And the kids are bringing the lessons learned about nutrition home.

Roxanne Smith, RN, School Nurse

“You start this education as early as kindergarten and they keep hearing it, the goal would be that you can change a whole generation.”

Natural Sound

“That’s an easy one. That’s a flavor you can take out and its not going to change the nutritional value of your meal.”

Heather Blanton, Teacher

“Kids are open for change, they’re open to trying new things. If you put a positive spin on it they’re like, we’ll try anything once. If it’s doesn’t hurt them and its not repulsive, they’re like okay, and it just tends to be a part of school and part of life.”

Narrator

Kids learn math as they measure ingredients for a healthy egg salad. They get to eat the test results.

Natural Sound - Classroom

“You are going to put your two slices together.”

Roxanne Smith, RN, School Nurse

“The research showed that when there is better nutrition, there are better academics, better behavior and already our data is proving that. We’ve had less referrals we’ve had less playground accidents. and I’ve had less clinic visits with children being ill.”

Arthur Agatston, MD, Cardiologist, Author, “The South Beach Diet”

“We’re really very optimistic about the future that we really can change the food in the schools, and the kids tell their parents about it, and it can spread to the greater community.”

Narrator

Next you’ll meet a man who finally got the message about the dangers of obesity – when he developed diabetes.

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Fact is – despite all of their efforts to lose weight - Americans on the whole are heavier than ever.

The most basic problem may be that people are simply eating too much.

Dr. John Buse, President of the American Diabetes Association Medicine and Science division and chief of endocrinology at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine says we can learn ways to limit the amount of food we eat.

John Buse, MD, PhD, American Diabetes Assoc., UNC School of Medicine

“Some of the techniques that work quite well is if you do eat outside the home see if they have some smaller portions or scrape off half the food and have them put it away in a doggie bag before you start eating.

At home be very careful about eating cereal in those giant boxes that are more like the size that you would use for detergent as opposed to a food product. There are very well done studies that show if you get a big box to pour your cereal from that you will in general eat a third more, not a little bit more, a third more for having poured it out of big box.”

Narrator

And that 1/3 more of cereal every day might not sound like much but it translates into fifty to sixty calories a day and over a year you’ll gain five pounds just from that. Dr. Buse says one tip is to find foods that make you feel full.

John Buse, MD, PhD, American Diabetes Assoc., UNC School of Medicine

“Vegetables and whole grains and fruits provide fiber, which seems to have an effect to sort of fill you up, out of proportion, with the amount of food that you actually eat. So we really encourage people to eat lots more vegetables and to make sure that fruit is a part of their daily intake.”

Narrator

The food label can help identify the nutritional make up of most foods. Called the “ Nutrition Facts Label” it will help you check the serving size and the number of servings; identify the calories, know your fats and reduce your sodium; and help you identify healthy, wholesome carbs, low-fat proteins and nutrient dense foods.

Bob Zelco has struggled with a weight problem his entire life. At age 39, he was diagnosed with type two diabetes caused by his chronic overweight condition. He was able to control it for a dozen years with diet – but eventually his doctor put him back on insulin, and told him to adopt a healthier lifestyle – or suffer the consequences.

Bob Zelco, Patient

“One of the first things that he did was send me to a dietician, not a dietician as much as a nutritionist to attempt to learn how to eat better, and to eat healthier and to have a healthier lifestyle.”

Paul Jellinger, MD, American Association of Clinical Endocrinology

“Principally when you gain weight and become overweight and obese you develop what’s called insulin resistance and the accumulation of adipose tissue or fat in the body which is what happens when you gain weight is associated with a large number of phenomena that occur in the body just by virtue of gaining that weight. When you lose weight the insulin resistance diminishes and your own body’s insulin starts to work better.”

John Buse, MD, PhD, American Diabetes Assoc., UNC School of Medicine

“Best evidence is that modest weight loss five to ten percent of body weight, so for a 200 pound person that might be 30 to 50 pounds overweight losing 10 or 20 pounds can reduce their risk of developing diabetes by more than half.”

Narrator

Think of it this way: You didn’t put on the extra pounds overnight and its going to take a while for them to come off safely. For example: If every day you eliminate 250 calories from your diet by substituting skim milk for whole milk, not buttering your bread, and replacing that one can of soda with a diet variety...and then work off another 250 calories by walking briskly on a treadmill for 60 minutes ... you will burn an extra 500 calories per day. Keep that up for a week and you’ll lose a pound, keep it up for six months and you’ll lose 25 pounds.

At age 58, Bob weighs almost 300 pounds, but he’s lost more than 35 pounds in six months, due to his commitment to change his life His blood sugar is under control and he takes his lifestyle changes one day at a time.

Bob Zelco, Patient

“You know even losing one or two pounds a month was going to be successful as far as I was concerned.”

Narrator

Dr. Jellinger wants Bob to lose another 30 pounds, and he's working at it. Bob has a family history of diabetes – his Dad died from diabetes-related kidney problems and his brother also died at age 39 from the complications of diabetes.

Bob Zelco, Patient

"I'm real motivated now to maintain level sugar counts and I get checked regularly. I check my own blood sugar regularly every day. It's real important to me to maintain a healthy lifestyle and keep my diabetes under control because frankly I don't want to die young or as a younger person. I'm not old yet. (Laughing) I got a long ways to go!"

Narrator

Lifestyle changes can alleviate a number of medical conditions in addition to diabetes.

Arthur Agatston, MD, Cardiologist, Author, "The South Beach Diet"

"We have many patients who come who have a genetic predisposition to heart disease and many assume that's their destiny to have a heart attack and die early. We tell them and we convince them that we have methods now for early diagnosis and to prevent heart disease. If people come early enough without a lot of risk then diet and exercise will reverse abdominal obesity and will be all you need. But to overcome the genetics and to overcome the years of bad lifestyle we do add the medications to diet and exercise. "

Narrator

But for the morbidly obese – and for overweight people with serious health problems – the final option may be surgery.

We'll talk more about the pros and cons of weight loss surgery – next.

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A recent study showed that for extremely obese people, surgery can be a viable and effective option. People in that category have a BMI of 40 or greater or a BMI of 35 to 40 combined with other health problems.

Surgery is usually recommended only after less invasive methods have failed or the patient is at high risk for illness. These operations change the anatomy of the digestive system to limit the amount of food the patient can eat or digest.

John Buse, MD, PhD, American Diabetes Assoc., UNC School of Medicine

"Where we know it clearly works is in the very overweight so using that BMI measurement people with a BMI over 40. In a man that would usually be people with weights in the high 200 pound range or higher. There the risks of uncontrolled diabetes and uncontrolled blood pressure are substantial and therefore, the risk of doing surgery really seems in balance. Where you can do a big procedure but because the risk of not doing a procedure is also high, there's a reasonable choice there."

Narrator

The risks are: 10 to 20 percent of patients develop complications following surgery. One person in two to three hundred actually dies after these procedures. Because of the risks

and the dramatic changes to the body, some experts wonder if surgery is an appropriate option for many who qualify for it.

John Buse, MD, PhD, American Diabetes Assoc., UNC School of Medicine

“Technically, you can have bariatric surgery if you’re obese but not morbidly obese if you have diabetes and hypertension and those kinds of problems. But I wonder a little bit whether we’ll look back on that and think that how is it that we decide as a society it was reasonable to do major abdominal surgery, you know, basically to be inflammatory, to mutilate our bodies to lose 20 or 30 pounds to help control diabetes.”

Natural Sound

“ I hope everybody came comfortable because we’re going to get you down on the ground.”

Narrator

Health problems were definitely on Lauren Schwal’s mind, after her weight ballooned up to almost 300 pounds. As Director of Education at Northwest Medical Center in Margate, Florida – she sees first hand, the misery obesity can cause; and heart problems run in her family.

Desperate to lose weight – at one point she considered having weight loss surgery.

Lauren Schwal, Patient

“I was in the 290s before I got on a scale one day – and realized if I gained 8 more pounds, that I couldn’t weigh myself on that scale any more, I would need one of those scales that we weigh our patients on, in the hospital with a sling and all that stuff...”

I had a moment of terror and decided I had to do something, which is when I decided that bariatric surgery, I was going to try it and I was a candidate, I was healthy, other than being very obese. But before I had the surgery I just got scared. I didn’t want to die. So I said let me just try dieting one more time.”

Narrator

Lauren joined a weight loss group, and committed herself to a lifetime of strictly controlling her food – and regular exercise. After losing 106 pounds, she still follows the same regimen – a meal replacement shake or bar for breakfast and lunch – and another one just before dinner. Then a healthy dinner of mostly grilled or broiled protein, vegetables and a salad.

Lauren says because of the psychological damage done by being overweight most of her life – she will never see a thin person in the mirror – but everyone else, her colleagues, her students, her friends and family – sees a hero.

That look at the scale, two years ago – plus support from her family, has kept Lauren exercising and eating right, and has kept those unwanted pounds, with their potential health problems, at bay.

Lauren Schwal, Patient

“I take it now one day at a time... I don’t think past today and that’s how I manage from day to day. You really do think about how am I going to go for hopefully the 50 years of my life without ever having a cookie or an ice cream or a piece of cake, a lot of people think that can’t be a good attitude, but for me, that’s what works.”

Narrator

Coming up we'll have some practical advice about designing your own healthy lifestyle.

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Narrator

Whether you want to lose weight or maintain a healthy weight, it's important to understand the connection between the calories your body takes in, through what you eat and drink, and the calories your body uses each day.

The number of calories you need depends on your age and activity level. Regular exercise helps control body weight by increasing the number of calories you burn each day. Experts tell us that as a minimum – adults need to be physically active at a moderate intensity for 30 minutes, most days of the week. Here are some tips for exercise success from the American Heart Association:

If you've been sedentary for a long time, or are overweight see your doctor before beginning a physical activity program.

Choose activities that are fun, not exhausting and add variety.

Wear comfortable, properly fitted footwear and comfortable, loose-fitting clothes.

Find a convenient time and place to do exercise

Use music to keep you entertained

Be an active role model for your children

Keep a record of your activities and reward yourself. Nothing motivates like success.

John Buse, MD, PhD, American Diabetes Assoc., UNC School of Medicine

"If people start these kinds of exercise programs it may be in the beginning that in a half an hour they can only walk a mile. Many people will be able to walk more than two miles in a half an hour. It's actually the distance that you cover that determines the number of calories that you burn. But the idea is you don't want to be huffing and puffing like you're going to pass out. You want to be breathing a little bit fast and breathing a little bit deep so it may interfere a bit with your ability to carry on a full conversation but you should be able to have a conversation with somebody while you're doing this kind of exercise."

Narrator

Experts tell us to choose the most nutritionally rich foods from each food group each day – those packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other nutrients, but lower in calories.

They stress that no matter what kinds of food you eat – controlling the serving size is probably the important factor.

New medications are being developed which may offer more options to prevent obesity and manage its complications. But the best way to lose weight is a permanent lifestyle change.

Even the smallest changes can make a difference – like parking a little farther from your door, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, or taking a walk during lunchtime.

Arthur Agatston, MD, Cardiologist, Author, "The South Beach Diet"

"It's never too late to make the changes... We have people in our practice who have had heart attacks, who have a lot of disease and who we've been treating for more than 10

years and are doing extremely well. We can still stop the progression of disease, so it's never too late, it's never time to throw in the hat."

Bob Zelco, Patient

"It's okay you don't have to have rapid weight loss. It's nice but the reality of it is if you're going to maintain a healthy lifestyle, learn to eat properly you're going to lose weight especially if you can add some exercise to the program."

Lauren Schwal, Patient

"No matter how you lose it, now you've reached the point where you've lost your weight, now you have to keep it off. And no matter how you lose it, Losing it ain't nothing compared to keeping it off, that's the challenge."

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For more information on weight loss and obesity please visit the following websites

The American Heart Association
www.heart.org

The American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org

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For a transcript of this program please visit our website @
www.thepatientchannel.com