

Canada faces obesity epidemic, legislative changes are vital

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With the increase in numbers of overweight children and young adults, Canada and other developed countries are facing an obesity epidemic and legislative approaches are required to address this issue, states an article in *CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal)*.

Canadians have become heavier and less fit over the last three decades; people aged 20-39 years have the BMI ([body mass index](#)) that people aged 40 or older had thirty years ago. The 2007-2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey found more than 60% of adults were overweight or obese, with 24% being overweight, and 37% obese. If such a trend is to continue, over the next 25 years, half of Canadians over age 40 will be obese.

"Obesity is expected to surpass smoking as the leading cause of preventable morbidity and mortality," writes author Dr. Mark J. Eisenberg, Jewish General Hospital, Divisions of Cardiology and Clinical Epidemiology, with coauthors. "Obesity reduces life expectancy by more than 10 years as a comorbidity with [coronary artery disease](#), osteoarthritis, dyslipidemia, hypertension, stroke and type 2 diabetes. Thus, obesity causes considerable morbidity and mortality and represents a burden of \$3.96 billion on the Canadian economy each year."

The consumption of high calorie foods, especially junk food, and decreases in activity levels are helping to fuel this increase in obesity. While it is viewed as a medical condition to treat, a variety of legislative approaches and public health interventions could help combat obesity.

Suggested government-level interventions include taxing junk food, improving serving size and nutritional labeling, banning certain foods and ingredients, and regulating sodium consumption. Corporate and school level solutions such as limiting access to [junk food](#) in schools are other approaches.

"Although obesity has traditionally been conceptualized as a physical problem for physicians to treat, there is increasing awareness of the role that governments, corporations and educators can play in preventing and reducing obesity," write the authors.

"The growing problem of [obesity](#) in Canada can be reversed only with an integrated approach involving both the public health and medical models," conclude the authors. "Stakeholders at all levels must be involved to achieve the greatest overall impact."

Provided by Canadian Medical Association Journal

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