

Large changes needed to address global obesity epidemic

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According to Rena Wing, professor of psychiatry and human behavior at The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University and director of the Weight Control & Diabetes Research Center at The Miriam Hospital, people who are most successful in preventing weight gain, and dieters who lose weight and keep the pounds off, have made major changes in their in diet and exercise routines.

Using new research findings, Wing will make her case for big behavioral changes to stave off weight gain at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the world's largest general scientific society.

At the meeting, held in Boston, Wing takes part in a Feb. 17, 2008 symposium titled "Fighting the Global Obesity Epidemic: Small Steps or Big Changes?"

"We live in an obesogenic environment that relies heavily on fast food, automobiles, and remote controls – all which can be labeled as 'toxic' to maintaining a healthy body weight," Wing said. "With our research, we want to determine the most successful strategies for maintaining a normal weight in this toxic environment. We've found that bigger changes are needed for success."

Along with James Hill of the University of Colorado Denver, Wing founded the National Weight Control Registry (NWCR), the largest prospective investigation of long-term successful weight loss

maintenance in the world. The registry includes data on more than 5,000 men and women who have, on average, lost 70 pounds and kept the weight off for six years.

At the symposium, Wing and Hill will present alternative views of how to best address the obesity epidemic. The crisis is worldwide in scope – health experts call it “globesity” – with more than 1 billion adults overweight and at least 300 million of them clinically obese.

Hill will argue that small daily changes, say using the stairs, are enough to prevent incremental weight gain that can lead to obesity. Wing, however, will make the case that much larger life-style changes – say exercising 60 to 90 minutes a day – are needed to prevent weight regain.

“Our data from the National Weight Control Registry suggests strategies associated with successful weight maintenance include high levels of physical activity and conscious control of eating habits,” said Wing. “Dieters who remain diligent about diet and exercise are much less likely to gain weight back.”

Examples of conscious control include frequent weighing, following a consistent dietary regimen across the weekdays and weekends, and taking fast action if small weight gains are observed.

Wing will also present new research findings that support the notion that large behavior changes are necessary in maintaining a normal weight – even in those who may not have to overcome a genetic or physiological propensity toward obesity.

“There’s no way around it,” Wing said. “If you want to lose weight and keep it off, you need to really change your lifestyle, particularly if you’re overweight or have a family history of obesity. The obesity epidemic won’t go away simply because people switch from whole to skim milk.

They need to substantially cut their calories and boost their physical activity to get to a healthy weight – and keep minding the scale once they do.”

Source: Brown University

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