

Drop that donut! Mexico pays portly cops to slim down

December 13 2019



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It's a sunny morning in Mexico City, and police officers drip with sweat as they do push-ups and squats, part of a program for overweight cops in one of the world's most obese countries.

The two dozen officers grimacing through their workout on the pavement of the station house yard—most with round bellies bulging beneath their drenched T-shirts—are just a handful of the more than 1,000 across the capital who have enrolled in the [program](#), "Healthy Police."

They get a bonus of 1,000 pesos (about \$50) a month to participate—though judging by the looks on their faces as their instructor shouts encouragement to finish one more set, some of them seem to doubt whether it's worth it.

But those who stick with the program, which was launched three months ago, say it can be life-changing.

"This was all completely new to me... The first month was tough, both mentally and physically," said one, Mauricio Barrera.

"But the program has helped me understand that [obesity](#) is an illness," the 26-year-old told AFP.

Barrera, who now looks fit and trim, cracked a grin when he revealed how much weight he has lost since he started: 16 kilos (35 pounds).

"This program is a way to fight the [obesity problem](#) we have in Mexico, the [sedentary lifestyle](#)," said Javier Ramirez, the buff fitness instructor guiding the beat cops through their routine.

"We want them to be in optimal condition so they can do their jobs effectively."

Obesity epidemic

Three-quarters of adults in Mexico are overweight or obese, according to national statistics.

Its obesity rate—nearly one-third of the adult population—is second only to the United States in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a 36-member group of developed countries.

Mexico's obesity epidemic is driving high rates of diabetes and heart disease, according to public health experts.

Officials have started looking for ways to combat the problem.

In 2014, the country leveled a tax on soda and other sugary beverages. One study estimates it will save 18,900 lives and more than \$983 million over 10 years.

This year, Congress also passed a law requiring manufacturers to put warning labels on junk foods high in sugar, sodium or saturated fat.

'Body feels the difference'

Mexico City's 83,000-member police force is not immune to the problem.

"My health was poor, and I was getting tired at work," said officer Graciela Benitez, 36, taking a break from her crunches.

She has lost around 10 kilos since she started the program, which also includes nutrition counseling sessions to help officers eat a more healthful, balanced diet.

"I used to feel sleepy after lunch. I was tired when I got to work," said Benitez.

"Now, I don't get tired. My body feels the difference."

The authorities are hoping she will serve as an example for more obese police.

Citation: Drop that donut! Mexico pays portly cops to slim down (2019, December 13) retrieved 24 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-12-donut-mexico-portly-cops-slim.html>

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