

Obesity Trends

There is no question that the incidence of obesity and overweight has increased significantly in the United States and in North Carolina since 1980. The most recent national data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) indicates that our entire population has tended to get heavier, and the heaviest of us have become much heavier.

This trend is of great concern because obesity has clearly been identified as a “killer disease”. As weight increases the risk of numerous complications increases, including coronary heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, cancers (endometrial, breast, and colon), stroke, high blood pressure, dyslipidemia (e.g., high cholesterol or triglycerides), sleep apnea, arthritis, and gynecologic disorders.

There are probably multiple causes of this increase in average weight. Factors which have been blamed include sedentary lifestyles, increased portion sizes, more restaurant meals, more fast food, decline in families eating together, television, computers, video games, decreases in physical education funding, inexpensive food, lack of dietary understanding, and a shortage of qualified physicians to treat the problem.

However, after a dramatic quarter century of increase, it appears that the incidence of obesity and overweight in American adults and children may be leveling off. Analysis of recent national data from the NHANES studies shows that among adult men the prevalence of obesity was 31.1% in 2003—2004, and 33.3% in 2005—2006, a small but not statistically significant change. Among adult women, the prevalence of obesity in 2003—2004 was 33.2%, and in 2005—2006 was 35.3%, again a small but not significant change. However, these figures indicating about 34% of adult Americans are obese remain quite high in comparison with the 15% of adults who were obese in the late 1970’s.

Obesity prevalence among children and adolescents showed no significant changes between 2003—2004 and 2005—2006. Based on the study, in the combined years of 2003—2006, 16.3% of children and adolescents aged 2–19 years were obese.

It is clear that even if our national obesity and overweight problem is leveling off, it remains at an unacceptably high level. Individuals who suffer from this problem should be aware of the major negative impact it has on the quality and length of their lives and should seek appropriate medical guidance. Patients who do not feel they are getting adequate results from their primary care physicians should seek care from a qualified specialist in the field. A directory is available at the website of the American Board of Bariatric Medicine.

www.abbmcertification.org