

ENCOURAGING HEALTHLY EATING

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ENCOURAGING HEALTHY EATING

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Abstract

ENCOURAGING HEALTHY EATING

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Today, more people are struggling to maintain or reach their ideal healthy weight. With the rate of obesity on the rise, this is a problem that many people deal with and may be confused by the true cause of their overeating. There are many potential causes of why people overeat. The first section of this paper discusses the different causes and theories behind the over consumption of food. The second section identifies solutions and strategies that can be utilized to beat overeating and promote a healthy lifestyle.

The expectation of this paper is that a reader will be able to identify causes of overeating and learn strategies on how to maintain a healthy weight. This paper outlines potential causes of why people over eat and explores new ideas and theories on how a person can make healthy lifestyle changes. These changes will have a positive impact on not just weight, but overall health. The review of literature was collected from scholarly articles and various health education websites.

In conclusion, this review of literature found that people have more control over their weight than may have been previously believed. A major finding is that Americans consume many more calories than actually required by their bodies. Americans need to educate themselves on their health and eating habits. While many people understand the concepts of eating healthy and exercising regularly, people still fall victim to consuming food that is convenient with low nutritional value, but high in calories. So why are so many Americans putting their health in jeopardy by eating poorly and not exercising? This paper takes steps toward finding the truth behind overeating.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In this world of highly processed foods- where the perfect combination of sugar, salt, and fat produce food with the maximum taste and calories- it should not come as a surprise that Americans are getting heavier. What is the real dollar cost of American's carrying around extra weight? Thousands of dollars? Millions of dollars? Try billions of dollars.

In 2000, the cost of obesity in the United States exploded at \$117 billion, according to former Surgeon General, David Satcher. The number of people dying from being overweight is rapidly increasing to rival the number of deaths that are caused by smoking. In the United States, approximately 300,000 deaths a year currently are associated with obesity and being overweight compared to more than 400,000 deaths a year associated with cigarette smoking (Thompson, 2001). Heart disease, type two diabetes, fatty liver, gall bladder, and respiratory diseases are just some of the health risks related to obesity and overweight.

One reason why Americans are eating more today than thirty years ago is simply that food is so much more available (Kessler, 2009). Today, all past "indulgent" foods are readily available at shopping malls or gas stations, and they have become extremely convenient. Since 1980, obesity has doubled among adults (Shields, 2009). The Center for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) has produced charts that help visualize the growing trend of obesity in the United States (see figures 1-3). The CDC defines obesity as a body mass index (BMI) of thirty or greater. The following charts place the United State's obesity epidemic into perspective.

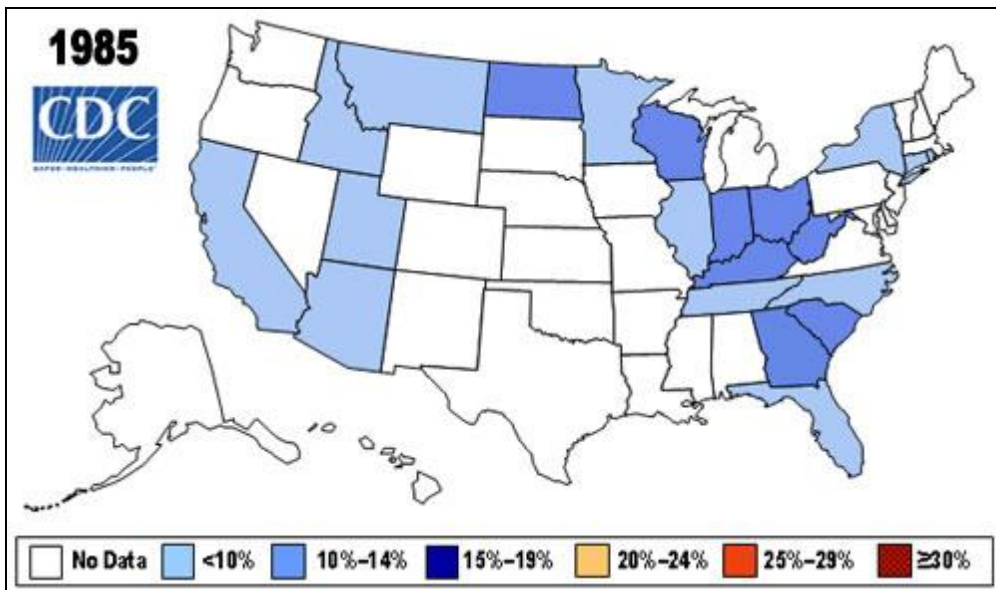


Figure 1
 1985 U.S. Obesity Trends
 Chart from Center for Disease Control & Prevention, www.cdc.gov/obesity/date/trends.html .

Figure 1.

In 1985, the chart shows that eight states had a relatively low amount of 10-14% (shown in medium blue) of their population that was classified as obese according to their BMI. Fourteen states had an even lower amount of 10% or lower (shown in light blue) of their population that was classified as obese. Twenty-eight of the states do not even show up yet on the obesity chart (shown in white).

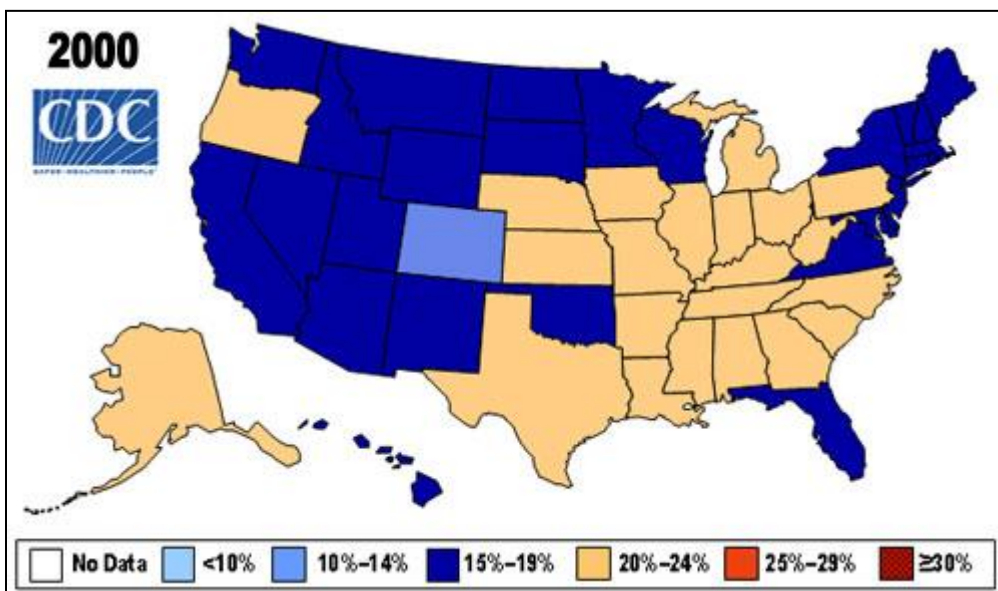


Figure 2
 2000 U.S. Obesity Trends
 Chart from Center for Disease Control & Prevention, www.cdc.gov/obesity/date/trends.html .

Figure 2.

Fifteen years later, the obesity trend starts becoming more wide spread. In the year 2000, the chart shows twenty-two states (shown in light orange) with the obesity populations of 20-24%. Twenty-seven states have 15-19% of their population being obese (shown in dark royal blue). There is one state (Colorado) in medium blue that represents only 10-14% of people are obese.

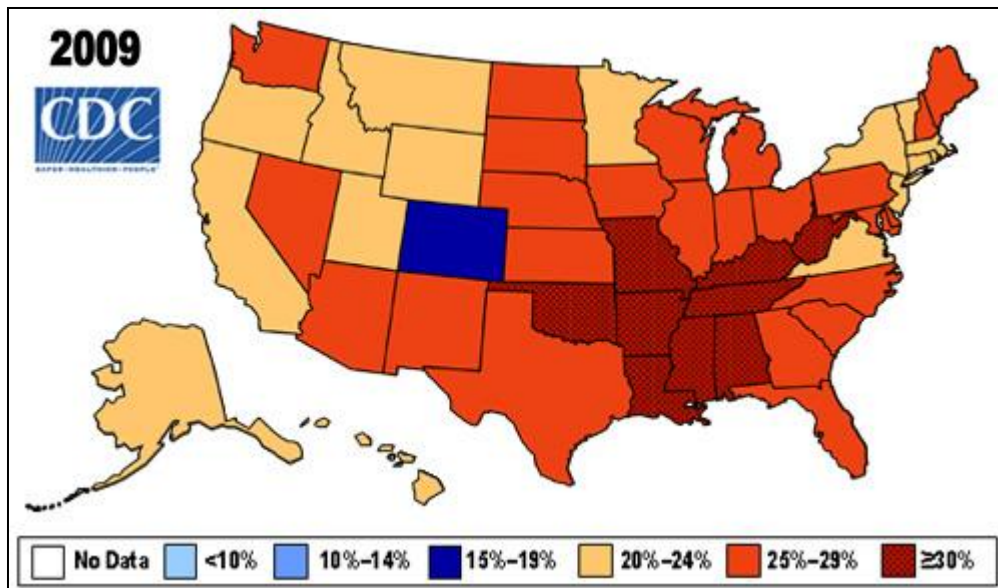


Figure 3
2009 U.S. Obesity Trends
Chart from Center for Disease Control & Prevention, www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/trends.html .

Figure 3.

This chart, only nine years later, clearly shows the major increase in obesity throughout most of the United States. This 2009 chart shows nine states that are in the highest category where 30% or more of their population is obese (shown in dark orange). Twenty-five states fall into the 25-29% obesity range (shown in medium orange). Fifteen states represent 20-24% of their population being obese (shown in light orange). Colorado is the only state shown in dark blue

representing 15-19% of their population as being obese, making Colorado the state with the lowest obesity percentage.

With the adult population obesity rate on the rise, there is also a growing concern for the health of children. Research suggests that overweight children lead to overweight adults, with many at a higher risk of health problems. In today's fast-paced world, it is often necessary to have a dual income family and to have multiple activities during the week. As a result, many Americans are always feeling that they are crunched for time. This makes fast-food drive-thru very attractive for the on-the-go family that is in a hurry to make it to soccer practice, piano lessons, and then a football game. Less and less American families are eating at home and if they do decide to eat at home it is mostly pre-packaged food that requires adding water to or heating up for convenience sake. These trends are troubling and have caused obesity to be recognized as one of the leading public health problems facing our society (Blair & Welk, 2000).

There is little agreement as to the exact origin of the obesity epidemic (Shields, 2009). However, there are many theories and ideas on what is causing Americans to eat themselves to death. Factors such as lack of time to prepare meals, convenient access to fast food, and calorie-dense packaged foods are some potential factors that add extra weight to Americans.

Statement of the Problem

Why are so many Americans becoming overweight or obese? What steps can be taken to encourage healthy eating?

Definition of Terms

Body Mass Index (BMI)-Is calculated by dividing one's weight in kilograms by one's height in meters squared. Thus, it is a measure of body weight relative to height and does not take actually body composition into account (Shields, 2009).

Body Mass Index (BMI)-A measure of an adult's weight in relation to his or her height, specifically the adult's weight in kilograms divided by the square of his or her height in meters (Center of Disease Control & Prevention, 2010).

Cue-Could be a sight, smell, time of day or location (Azzam, 2010).

Dopamine-The neurotransmitter associated with the pleasure center (Kessler, 2009).

Emotional Eating-Food consumption that occurs in response to various emotional states or cues such as boredom, loneliness, or anxiety (Timmerman & Acton, 2001).

Energy balance-Energy intake and expenditure must be relatively equal (Shields, 2009).

Obesity-Is when a person has a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or greater. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010).

Overeating-Eating more calories than you expend-more calories in than out. So, you have a net weight gain (Azzam, 2010).

Delimitations of Research

The research was conducted through the Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, over (90) days. Primary searches were conducted through the internet via EBSCO Host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: National Institutes of Health's website. Key search topics included "Motivating Healthy Eating", "Healthy Lifestyles", "Overeating", "Behavior Modification", "Nutrition", "Obesity", and "Dieting".

Method of Approach

A review of literature was conducted relating to research, summary studies, and anecdotal evidence for causes of overeating and lack of physical activity, associated problems, and ways to encourage or motivate healthy eating and lifestyles. The findings were summarized, synthesized, and recommendations were made.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Since the 1960's, Americans have been getting heavier. The average weight has continually increased. For example, in 1960, women between the ages of twenty to twenty-nine averaged about 128 pounds; by 2000, the average weight of women in that age group increased to 157 pounds (Kessler, 2009). Why does this happen? Many people could point their fingers at the ready-availability of food, increased portion size, the growing number of restaurants, today's culture, or the sheer convenience of eating out. Does the mere fact of having food in front of a person make them eat more? Some may think it has to do with a lack of will power or low self-esteem, but it is a little more complicated. With the growing rate of obesity as a person ages combined with the ballooning elderly population, problems with obesity and health are likely to get even worse in the near future (Blair & Welk, 2000).

There are many causes of overeating such as larger portion sizes, more chain restaurants, more neighborhood food outlets, and a culture that promotes eating out. According to one research study (Roberts, 2008), there are five instinctive eating behavior categories that contribute to overeating: hunger, availability, calorie intake, familiarity, and variety. In addition to these categories, this paper will also address food labels, restaurants, and portion size. The first topic that will be addressed is hunger.

Causes

Hunger

Many people eat simply because they feel hungry. People enjoy satisfying their hunger and the feeling of being full. Hunger is one of the two main reasons people give for quitting their diet, the other reason is that they miss their favorite foods (Roberts, 2008). American's routines of breakfast, lunch, dinner, plus snacks can contribute to the feeling of hunger. Some eating times are based strictly on one's work day that may include scheduled snack breaks and lunch break. The time of day and timing of meals are simple associations that are often enough to trigger someone's hunger (May, 2008). However, if a person is always feeling hungry it may be more than just the time of day. They may be making the wrong food choices. By eating the wrong foods, people may easily start overeating without even being aware of it. May (2008) describes this behavior as *mindless eating*, and it is closely related to the availability of foods.

Availability

Another reason why Americans are eating more today than thirty years ago is simply that food is so much more widely available (Kessler, 2009). In the past, people indulged in cookies, soda, and other treats only once in a while. Today all former *indulgent* foods are readily available almost anywhere and at any time. People eat just because the food is there (Roberts, 2008). The more food that is available for a person to consume, the more a person will most likely eat! This mindless eating can easily had extra weight on a person without them even realizing where it is coming from. Anytime there is free access to food (i.e. all-you-can-eat buffet) the more one is likely to eat more. Studies of these behaviors suggest that people always eat more during those unrestricted eating situations.

Calorie Intake

Another main cause of gaining weight, that may seem obvious, is simply that people are consuming more calories than they can burn. Simply stated by Dr. Sinbure, “*weight gain in the American population seems to be virtually all explained by eating more calories*” (“The Overeating Epidemic,” 2009, p. 1). Many of these calories are consumed without the person even realizing it. People gain weight and fat because they eat more than people who are lean and weight gain is primarily caused by overeating (Kessler, 2009). So much of American’s eating takes place without the person even realizing it. This can make it very easy for a person to underestimate how many calories they are eating. How much a person eats truly predicts how much a person will weigh (Kessler, 2009). The more calories a person consumes the more weight a person puts on. Exercise can help, but the calorie intake has a much greater stake in determining weight.

Familiarity (Emotional Eating/Indulging)

In general, eating is associated with celebrations of special happy occasions and people eat in times of heart-break or struggle. Emotional eating plays a large role for many when it comes to overeating. People eat when they are happy, sad, and bored. People enjoy eating foods that are familiar. People associate these foods with feeling safe and comforted, and there are triggers that can drive people to eat them again...and again (Roberts, 2008). A place and memory may also cause a desire to eat at a certain place and certain food. There have been studies that have found connections between low self-esteem, emotional eating, and being overweight. The food consumed in order to help a person deal with their feelings comes with weight gain and regret.

Due to the large amounts of stress that many American deal with, Americans seem to enjoy self-indulgent treats and feel entitled to do so (Kessler, 2009). Stress can come from many factors such as anger, anxiety, loneliness, stress, boredom, and (more recently) unemployment. By overeating, some people feel that it helps them cope with stress and distract themselves from the difficult emotions that they are dealing with (May, 2008). Many people see eating as a moment of “me time”. Restaurants are making the self-indulgent treat of eating out even easier with the easy pick up (i.e. Applebee’s Carside to Go service). Many restaurants have special parking for convenient pick up or personal delivery.

Variety

Besides the fact that food is readily available; there is also a large *variety*. People who overeat seem to thrive when they have variety. People are drawn to a variety of foods, and people eat much more when they are presented with more choices (Roberts, 2008). For example, in the past, it was a big deal to get some vanilla ice cream. There was only one flavor that was offered. Then there was another flavor choice...chocolate. Pretty soon there was a third flavor choice, strawberry. The more variety and the more availability of foods, the more people will eat. With more variety and additional flavors, the more our brain is stimulated and produces dopamine (Kessler, 2009), which in turns, makes people *happy* and gives them pleasure from eating. Dopamine is the neurotransmitter associated with the pleasure center (Kessler, 2009). A person’s brain lights up with dopamine at even the thought of food (American Journal of Medicine, 2009).

Labels

Nutritional labels can be found on all packages of food and only recently started to show up in restaurants. By seeing these labels or nutritional values, people are becoming aware of what they are truly putting in their mouths when they go out to eat at restaurants. However, there are many different names for sugar and the average person would not be able to recognize these. The first ingredient listed is what the food item contains the most of. However, since a food company can classify sugar into so many different “technical names”, it may often look like something else is the main ingredient instead of sugar. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has been successful with nutritional facts being placed on food packages, but it has not reached the restaurants.

Blaming Restaurants

Some hold restaurants and take out places responsible for much of American’s growing waistlines. Professor Susan Roberts of Tufts University refers to her theory as the *Restaurant Syndrome* (Roberts, 2008), a four-step feedback loop:

1. Eat Out
2. Eat Too Much
3. Feel Bad
4. Repeat

Robert’s research has led her to believe the simple fact that the more you eat out the more you will weigh because eating out leads to overeating. Roberts has also come up with the *second meal effect*. The second meal effect is described as being hungrier and needing to eat more at the

next meal to feel adequately satisfied after a particularly delicious meal. In general, Americans are eating out and utilizing take out at an alarming rate.

Portion size

Portion size has increased throughout the last thirty years at a steady rate. During the last half of the 1990's, portion sizes increased more than sixty times (Anderson & Butcher, 2006). For example, it started as a can of soda, and then came the 16 ounce bottle, and now the 32 ounce big slam. The size of the dinner plates and glasses has increased at restaurants. Buffet choices have become more popular instead of ordering a single meal. Restaurants push for appetizers, a full meal, and then dessert when dining out. Eating food away from home encourages overconsumption due to the typically higher fat, higher calorie count, and larger portions (Shields, 2009). In addition when people eat out, they may not be aware that the nutritional facts are often broken into serving sizes where one complete meal includes multiple servings. Today's environment encourages overconsumption of foods high in fat and increased portion sizes.

Solutions & Strategies

There are many solutions and strategies that a person can examine when trying to make healthy changes to their life. Most of these are simple adjustments. In fact, many people are already aware of them, but need to make a conscious effort to incorporate the healthy alternative into their everyday lives. Some solutions include adding or increasing the amount of exercise, watching the amount of calories consumed, and making minor diet adjustments. Small diet changes like adding fiber and protein can have great positive impact on a person's health. By

starting to make small changes, a person can really start to feel better and get closer to their ideal healthy weight. The first solution that is addressed is exercise.

Exercise

One healthy change for people to make is to add some physical activity to their everyday lives. Exercise is great for physical health, state of mind, and preventing weight gain in the first place, but it has a disappointingly small effect on weight loss (Roberts, 2008). Exercise is very important to help maintain a healthy lifestyle, but eating habits is even more crucial. While physical inactivity appears to be a strong contributing factor to the etiology of obesity, studies on the effectiveness of physical activities in promotion weight loss have been less than encouraging (Blair & Welk, 2000). These results can be discouraging for people who started exercising, hoping that it would help enough so they could continue their same eating patterns. “Physical activity is clearly viewed as being essential to the prevention of weight gain, but fairly ineffective (at least in clinical trial) at promoting weight loss” (Blair & Welk, 2000). Exercise is extremely important for someone’s health and the fight against obesity. However, the calorie intake seems to play the biggest role when a person is trying to lose weight.

Caloric Intake

Low level of food consumption can have beneficial effects on our health (Pinel, 2000). Studies have shown that United States citizens are living in a society that over consume calories. People are consuming many more calories than they actually need. One way for people to take control of their calorie intake is to keep track in a food journal. It may sound simple, but many people would probably be surprised by the amount of calories they are eating. Another idea is to

modify eating habits by replacing favorite junk foods with healthier food options. A person can also start eating meals in smaller portion sizes. By cutting the portion size, a person offers their body the amount of required calories needed to properly function and the body will not have to deposit extra calories as fat (Roberts, 2008). While consuming the correct number of calories is important, another thing to consider is what those calories contain. Fiber and protein play a vital role and should be incorporated when trying to achieve a healthy lifestyle and weight.

Fiber

Another item to take into consideration when dieting is the inclusion of fiber in the diet. Fiber is very important and helpful for losing weight and maintaining a person's ideal weight. According to Roberts's (2008) research, people who eat 35 to 45 grams of fiber per day feel more satisfied during weight loss and lose more weight than those who eat less than that. On average, American diets include only 16 grams of fiber a day, not even close to the recommended level for weight maintenance, which is 25 grams per day for women and 35 grams per day for men (Roberts, 2008).

There are two different types of fiber: insoluble dietary fiber and soluble dietary fiber. Insoluble dietary fiber provides bulk at the top of your gastrointestinal (GI) tract to the bottom. Soluble dietary fiber dissolves in water to form a thick gel that aides in a healthy GI tract. It is very important to drink the daily recommended six to eight glasses of water a day when you add more fiber to your diet in order to receive the full benefits of the fiber. Due to its water holding property, fiber works like a sponge to absorbs water and helps make a person feel more satisfied (Roberts, 2008). Without enough fiber in a diet, people will consume more calories just to help them feel full.

Protein

Having fiber in a person's diet has many health benefits, but it is also important to include protein. Protein is necessary to build and repair vital body tissues. It produces enzymes, hormones, and other substances that are used by the body. Every cell in a person's body needs protein to carry out all metabolisms that sustain us (Benardot, 2006). Protein also prevents fatigue by producing stamina and energy. Complete proteins are foods that contain all of the essential amino acids, such as: chicken, fish, eggs, milk, and lean cuts of beef or pork. According to Dr. Kyle Brown, of St. Louis University of Medical Sciences Center, people who lack adequate amounts of protein are losing muscle, and slowing down their immunity. Studies have shown that when protein is consumed at low levels people lose lean body tissue, but when protein is at good level there is an increase in lean body tissue (Knudsen, 1996). In order to have optimal health and maintain a healthy weight it is important to consume the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) of protein every day. As a general guide, the RDA, in the United States for protein is 0.8 grams per kilogram of body weight of adults (Benardot, 2006). For example, an average person who weighs 165 pounds (75 kilogram) has a protein requirement of 60 grams per day. Protein is one of the most important nutrients needed by the human body and needs to be consumed sufficiently and daily.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Over the last thirty years, Americans have been struggling with overeating and this leads to many health problems. This paper provided evidence that obesity is a major problem in the United States and is continually growing at an alarming rate. This obesity trend is costing the United States billions of dollars, according to the former Surgeon General, David Satcher. This paper gives information on the causes of overeating and solutions that can help the reader reach a healthier life.

The existing literature on the topic of overeating leads to the following conclusions that hunger, food availability, calorie intake, emotions, lack of exercise, lack of protein, lack of fiber, eating out at restaurants, and oversized portions are all potential factors that lead to people overeating. It is imperative that people become aware of these causes so they can begin to identify the changes they need to make to reach healthier body weight.

Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that if someone is serious about shedding some pounds and putting an end to their overeating, a person needs to first take a look at what they are consuming. It may sound simple and obvious, but people consume many more calories than they realize. Using a food journal to document the food choices, amount of food, and the calorie intake is a good place to begin in the battle of weight loss. Some people will be quite surprised about their eating choices when they read through their weekly food journal. This can be powerful information when examining a person's current eating behaviors. Another recommendation that has been made is to add fiber and protein to a person's diet. Adding fiber and protein to a person's regular diet has many amazing benefits (i.e. fiber makes you feel full longer and protein assists the body to build lean muscle). A bowl of all bran cereal to get fiber in

the morning or some egg whites to get some protein is a great way to for a person to start their day. It is also important to get active. Although, physical activity does not always place a major role in helping a person lose weight, it will increase a person's energy level and have great health benefits for a person's body. More importantly, Americans need to stop blaming food companies or restaurants. Such places only provide the food that people demand. Once Americans start demanding healthier food choices, restaurants and food companies will have no choice, but to have those items available for consumers.

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