Beat: Arts

30 percent of world;s population is now fat, study shows

-, 30.05.2014, 04:19 Time

USPA News - Almost a third of the world`s population, some 2.1 billion people, are now either obese or overweight after a global rise in obesity rates over the last three decades, according to a new analysis which shows not a single country has been able to reduce obesity rates. The study, conducted by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, analyzed trend data from 188 countries between 1980 and 2013. It shows that the number of overweight and obese individuals globally increased from 857 million in 1980 to 2.1 billion in 2013. Overweight is defined as having a Body Mass Index (BMI), or weight-to-height ratio, greater than or equal to 25 and lower than 30, while obesity is defined as having a BMI equal to or greater than 30. During the last three decades, rates of overweight and obesity among adults have equally increased from 29 percent to 37 percent for men and from 30 percent to 38 percent for women.

In developed countries, men had higher rates of overweight and obesity, while women in developing countries exhibited higher rates. The peak of obesity rates is also moving to younger ages in developed countries. "Obesity is an issue affecting people of all ages and incomes, everywhere," said Dr. Christopher Murray, director of IHME and a co-founder of the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study. "In the last three decades, not one country has achieved success in reducing obesity rates, and we expect obesity to rise steadily as incomes rise in low- and middle-income countries in particular, unless urgent steps are taken to address this public health crisis." Looking at individual countries, the highest proportion of the world`s obese people live in the United States with 13 percent. China and India together represent 15 percent of the world`s obese population. Rates in the study were age-standardized, meaning they were adjusted for differences in population size and ages over time and across countries. Among children and adolescents, the study showed obesity has increased substantially worldwide. Between 1980 and 2013, the prevalence of overweight or obese children and adolescents increased by nearly 50 percent, according to the figures. In 2013, more than 22 percent of girls and nearly 24 percent of boys living in developed countries were found to be overweight or obese. Rates are also on the rise among children and adolescents in the developing world, where nearly 13 percent of boys and more than 13 percent of girls are overweight or obese. Particularly high rates of child and adolescent obesity were seen in Middle Eastern and North African countries, notably among girls. "The rise in obesity among children is especially troubling in so many low- and middle-income countries," said Marie Ng, Assistant Professor of Global Health at IHME and the paper`s lead author. "We know that there are severe downstream health effects from childhood obesity, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and many cancers. We need to be thinking now about how to turn this trend around." Countries in the Middle East and North Africa, Central America, and Island nations in the Pacific and Caribbean have already reached exceptionally high rates of overweight and obesity. In 2013, the highest rates of overweight and obesity were seen in the Middle East and North Africa, where more than 58 percent of men and 65 percent of women age 20 or older were found to be overweight or obese. More than two-thirds of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa had overweight and obesity rates of over 50 percent in both adult men and women. In Central America, more than 57 percent of adult men and more than 65 percent of adult women were overweight or obese, with the highest prevalence - greater than 50 percent among men and women - found in Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico. In the Pacific Islands, nearly 44 percent of men and more than 51 percent of women are overweight or obese, as are nearly 38 percent of men and more than 50 percent of women in the Caribbean. While the percentage of people who are either overweight or obese has risen substantially over the last 30 years, there have been marked variations across regions and countries, the authors of the study said. In developed countries, increases in obesity that began in the 1980s and accelerated from 1992 to 2002 have slowed since 2006, for example. Conversely, in developing countries, where almost two-thirds of the world`s obese people currently live, increases are likely to continue. The high numbers of overweight and obese people represent serious public health concerns. In 2010, obesity and overweight were estimated to have caused 3.4 million deaths, most of which were from cardiovascular causes. Research indicates that if left unchecked, the rise in obesity could lead to future declines in life expectancy. In 2008, another study estimated the number of overweight adults in the world to be 1.46 billion, of which 508 million were considered obese. The World Bank said last year that studies showed the number of obese people is expected to nearly double to 1.12 billion by 2030, driven by high and volatile food prices because unhealthy food tends to be cheaper than healthy ones.

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-2256/30-percent-of-worlds-population-is-now-fat-study-shows.html

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