

18 August 2006

By: Alexandra Lupu, Health News Editor



[Higher Rates of Obesity in China Equal Western Ones](#)

The prevalence of overweight and obesity among Chinese people, especially among children, has become a crucial public health problem

In an editorial published in the today online issue of the British Medical Journal (BMJ), Professor Yangfeng Wu from the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences in Beijing warns that Chinese people become overweight and obese at an alarmingly fast rate. What was known in the past as one of the slimmest and leanest nation seems to come up to equal high rates of obesity registered in Western countries. Professor Yangfeng Wu informs in his editorial that Chinese people have come to account for one fifth of the overweight population worldwide. Moreover, what is more worrying is the fact that Chinese rates of obesity have considerably increased over a rather short period of time. Surveys show that the prevalence of overweight and obesity in China caught up with the one in Western countries, even though West population have been known since long to be a fast-food addicted nation. Investigating data from the 2002 National Nutrition and Health Survey carried out in China, Prof. Wu found that the rapid increase in obesity rates is mostly related to infant and child obesity, especially to boys. Obesity rates in children with ages ranging from 7 to 18 were 28 times higher in 2002 as compared to surveys lasting from 1985. Also, between 1985 and 2000, obesity was found to have risen 4 times in infants and children. The leading causes which led to considerably higher obesity rates in Chinese people are mostly related to people giving up to their traditional diets and adopting more Western, unhealthy eating habits, reduced rates of physical activity and exercising and also an increase was noticed in the sedentary lifestyle adopted by Chinese people. "Recent data from the national surveys of nutrition indicate noticeable changes in the proportions, and sources, of dietary macronutrients over the past 20 years. Energy intake from animal sources has increased from 8% in 1982 to 25% in 2002, and the average energy intake from dietary fat among urban Chinese increased from 25% to 35%, which is above the upper limit of 30% recommended by the WHO," writes Professor Yangfeng Wu in his editorial. The high rates of obesity registered in China population may be related to their beliefs that body fat and animal meat are signs of good life and wellbeing. The misconception that being fat is a good thing for an individual is a consequence of many years of famine and chronic malnutrition which haunted Chinese population around the 1950's. Due to the fact that in those scanty years millions of individuals died from very poor nutrition, many Chinese may think nowadays that eating as much as one can and affording to buy food anytime and in any amount is a sign of leading a happy life. What they fail to notice is that all the animal products, fast-food aliments etc, are not at all healthy and may cause millions of people to die from too much eating. "As in other countries, China's epidemic of overweight and obesity poses a considerable public health problem, and it is becoming increasingly clear that we need to act now to prevent any further increase. The means by which this may be accomplished remain elusive. In randomized trials, intensive lifestyle education has been shown to result in modest but sustained weight loss; the feasibility and efficacy of conducting such studies in China is uncertain but should be investigated," the author of the BMJ editorial concluded.