

Obesity on the Rise in the U.S.

The Associated Press
Obesity is a U.S. epidemic that has surged in the past decade and now affects nearly one in five adults, killing some 300,000 a year, a collection of new studies suggest.

The studies, which will be published in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association, are the latest to spread the warning that Americans are getting fatter - and that fat kills.

"Obesity is a major cause of mortality in the United States," concludes one of the surveys.

One study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that the number of Americans considered obese - defined as being more than 30 percent over their ideal body weight - soared from about one in eight in 1991 to nearly one in five last year.

In 1991, four out of 45 participating states had obesity rates of 15 percent or higher, while the figure for 1998 was 37 states, according to the study.

That data, which was to be announced today at the AMA's annual Science Reporters Convention, was based on telephone surveys of more than 100,000 participants each year between 1991-98.

Younger adults, people with some college education and Hispanics showed the most drastic increases, but "a steady increase was observed in all states; in both sexes; across age groups, races, educational levels; and occurred regardless of smoking status," the study found.

Overall, the population of obese men and women increased from 12 percent in 1991 to 17.9 percent last year, according to the CDC survey, which said that figure might be conservative.

Other recent research has found that more than 50

percent of Americans are overweight and 22 percent are obese, even though weight-loss products and services are a \$33 billion-a-year industry.

Being overweight has been strongly associated with greater risk of certain illnesses, including heart disease, high cholesterol and blood pressure, diabetes, stroke and some cancers.

A recent study in the New England Journal of Medicine of more than 1 million Americans concluded that obese people run a significant risk of dying early, even if they don't smoke and are otherwise healthy.

Another study in this week's JAMA issue on obesity - all of the studies involved Americans at least the age of 18 - attributed an estimated average of about 280,000 deaths a year to being overweight, but said the figure could be more than 374,000 when the numbers are calculated differently.

The figures were adjusted for sex, age and whether the subjects smoked but did not factor in chronic disease or family histories that might indicate a predisposition to an illness.

An editorial accompanying the obesity issue of JAMA calls for developing a comprehensive national strategy to prevent obesity.

Growth in the marketing of fast food and snack food, as well as lack of exercise, are among the reasons Americans are taking in more calories than they burn, the editorial concluded.

"Children watch more television daily, physical education has been markedly reduced in our schools, many neighborhoods lack sidewalks for safe walking, the workplace has become increasingly automated, household chores are assisted by labor-saving machinery, and walking or bicycling has been replaced by automobile travel," the editorial said.

Growth Hormone Might Contribute To Weight Woes

contributed story for The Portland Observer

Hormonal differences that might help explain why African-American girls grow faster and taller than their Caucasian counterparts could also be stacking the metabolic deck in favor of weight gain in adulthood.

Researchers at the USDA/ARS Children's Nutrition Research Center at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston report that African-American girls have higher blood levels of the biologically active form of a potent growth hormone known as "free IGF-1" than their Caucasian peers.

The study, the first to report ethnic differences involving Insulin-like Growth Factor-1 (IGF-1), is reported in the September issue of the Journal of Pediatrics.

"This raises the question of whether high levels of free IGF-1 are accelerating growth in African-

American children and whether these higher levels could be a factor in excessive weight gain if they persist once growth is complete," said Dr. William Wong.

The study involved 136 normal-weight, healthy African-American and Caucasian girls between the ages of 9 and 17. The study was designed to gain insight into the reason African-American girls are more sexually mature, taller and heavier, with both more lean muscle mass and body fat than their Caucasian counterparts.

"In addition to the higher levels of free IGF-1, the African-American girls had corresponding lower blood levels of two specific binding proteins. These binding proteins tie up free IGF-1 in the bloodstream, making it inactive," he said.

According to Wong, the liver's production of one of these binding proteins is inhibited by insulin.

"These results suggest that insulin might be involved in how much free IGF-1 is in circulation," he said. This connection is significant because non-diabetic, healthy, normal-weight African-American children also have higher blood insulin levels.

Higher blood insulin levels are thought to predispose individuals to insulin-resistant Type 2 diabetes. However, even if diabetes does not develop, high insulin levels might contribute to the development of high cholesterol levels, weight problems and hypertension, which are all more prevalent among African Americans.

"If we can unravel the molecular and genetic mechanisms responsible for ethnic differences in free IGF-1 levels, we might also discover factors that predispose African Americans to high insulin levels and related weight and cardiovascular problems," Wong said.

Winter shelters for homeless families open November 1

contributed story for The Portland Observer

As homeless numbers rise, shelters seek volunteers

Multnomah County's six winter shelters for homeless families will open on Monday, November 1st. The shelter network expands each winter to assist homeless families during the year's coldest months. The program runs through March 31st.

Despite a strong local economy, the number of homeless families in Multnomah County continues to rise. "Last year we counted 38% more homeless families than in 1993," notes Donna Shackelford, who coordinates the County's homeless services to families. "We estimate that 622 families are homeless in Multnomah County at any point in time."

The County defines a "family" as a person or couple with a child under 18. Sadly, 17% of the County's homeless are children under six years old.

Increasing housing costs and a decrease in livable wage jobs are among the reasons for the rise in homelessness. According to the federal government, the fair market rent (the cost of an average rental) for a two-bedroom operate only in winter and three are year-round facilities. Several

shelters provide day services. To access a shelter, families should contact one of the following referral numbers:

For Downtown and Inner Southeast: 721-1500

Shelters: Goose Hollow (winter only), Salvation Army Door of Hope (all year), Sunnyside (winter only).

For East County: 491-0578

Shelter: Metropolitan Portland East County Inter-Faith Hospitality Network (new all year facility).

For North/Northeast: 721-6760

Shelter: YWCA Safehaven (all year)

For Southeast: 736-6000

Shelter: Reedwood (winter only)

Shelter guest receive case management with the goal of helping them find long term or permanent housing. The average length of stay in a shelter for a homeless family is 30 days.

Shelters rely heavily on volunteer help. There are simple ways to help as a volunteer and time commitments are flexible. For volunteer information, contact Donna Shackelford at 248-3999, Ext. 28402.

Multnomah County is responsible for services to homeless families and youth. The City of Portland serves homeless single individuals and couples without children.

Oregon City bans after-school fights

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Derick Garcia hasn't seen the new violent movie "Fight Club" and he doesn't understand the fuss about the punching matches among him and his friends, girls included.

The Oregon City High School senior has been boxing since he was a boy, something done just for fun with his Dad, his older brother or his buddies at a park down the street. They wear gloves.

Everything would have been just fine, Garcia said, if one of his classmates hadn't told a newspaper reporter about the unsupervised Friday boxing matches held since February at Atkinson Park, a thicket of trees atop a bluff overlooking the Willamette River and the skyline of nearby Portland.

"I couldn't believe it," Garcia said. "Nobody cared it about until all of a sudden there were all these TV guys and they're making this into some huge thing. They were way out of control."

At a time of increased scrutiny of teen violence, word of the boxing hit the news about the same time that "Fight Club," a Brad Pitt movie centered on a brutal, barefisted club for men, began its final advertising blitz before its release to theaters. The film received extra attention in Oregon because it's based on a novel by a Portland writer, Chuck Palahniuk.

"I didn't even know there was a movie like that until a reporter told me," said Garcia, 18. "But this is nothing. It's just having fun. There's no grudge matches or anything like that. We're all friends."

A few girls tried it too, but "it was just cat fighting," the 18-year-old Garcia said. "Nobody hurt anybody else." Still, the Oregon City Commission voted Wednesday night to ban the fights from city parks.

property as long as neighbors are not disturbed. Officials said they hope the youths will choose to hold the matches in a place where they can be supervised.

"We've expressed our concerns over safety issues with participants," said Lt. Rocky Smith of the Oregon City police. "At this point we haven't made any headway toward getting them into a ring, or some place with supervision."

Garcia's mother, Cherie, said the teens already have tried boxing at each other's homes. She said they have been more careful, and are getting

better equipment, including headgear and mouthpieces.

"They just really like it," Mrs. Garcia said. "They enjoy it. For the last year, it's been a way to get aggressions out. They are all friends and all the attention has kind of encouraged them more."

Garcia says that he and his friends held the fights in the park because nobody wanted to join a boxing club or put in long hours of training and coaching.

"That's way too much work," he said. "I'm not going to make a career out of it."

He should be screaming at the top of his lungs

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Help shape our transportation future

During the past five years, residents have joined with local governments from across the region to identify how we can best meet our future transportation needs. Now it's time to take a final look at the Regional Transportation Plan - our 20-year blueprint for the region's transportation system - before it is finally adopted.

Regional elected officials are seeking comments on the plan's recommended motor vehicle, transit, pedestrian, bicycle and freight projects, and on ways to finance these long-term needs.

In addition, state and regional decision-makers need your input about transportation projects on the state system proposed for priority funding with part of the recently passed increase in the gas tax and vehicle registration fees.

Public comment meetings

Come to one of the following meetings to learn more and to comment:

5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 20
Conestoga Middle School
12250 SW Conestoga Drive
Beaverton

5:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 21
Gresham City Hall
1333 NW Eastman Parkway
Gresham

5:30 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 26
Metro Regional Center
600 NE Grand Ave.
Portland

5:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 28
Monarch Hotel
12566 SE 93rd Ave.
Clackamas

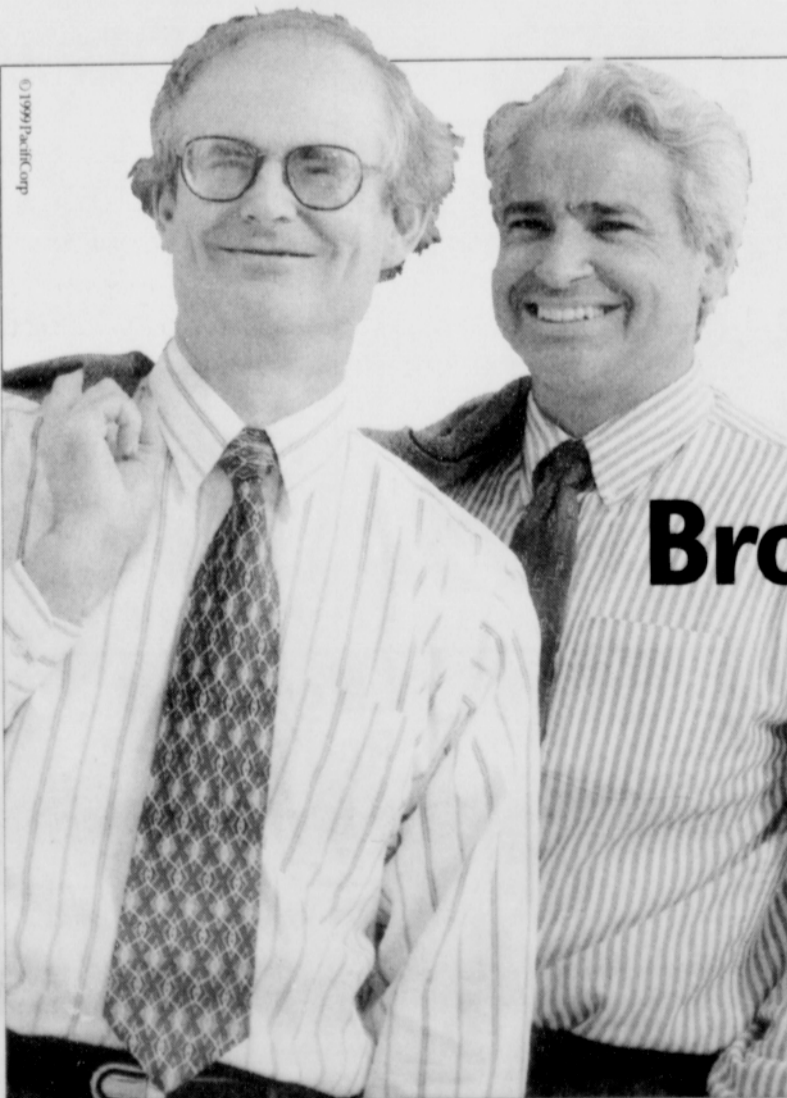
For more information, call Metro's transportation hotline, (503) 797-1900, option 2, or visit www.metro-region.org. For ODOT, call 731-8245 or visit www.odot.state.or.us/stip/



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Oregon Department of Transportation



When Pacific Power engineers say, "there has to be a better way," it's not just talk.

Dean Miller and Brad Williams were sure that they could come up with a quicker, more reliable way to pinpoint and resolve problems on power circuits. If there was an outage, this would help get the power back on to customers faster. The technology existed. It would just have to be applied the right way.

So Dean and Brad, along with their co-worker Tom Eyford, put their heads together and came up with a remote control process that combines the automation of power pole-top switches with computer operations at the substations.

Here's how it works: the pole-top switches send information back to the substation

computers. If the computer detects a problem, it can automatically close a switch, and immediately reroute power around the problem. Not only is the power back on faster, but line crews can also be dispatched more effectively to fix the trouble spot.

The new control scheme was tested in Portland, which showed that outage times could be reduced drastically. The team knew their idea was a winner. In fact, the process is so state-of-the-art, the engineers were awarded a patent. The plan is to install the automated switches along with other reliability measures throughout the Pacific Power service area, from big cities to rural towns, in the coming years.

"This kind of innovation, along with other new technologies like customer outage monitors and intelligent meters, improves our responsiveness and also helps keep costs down," said Jim

Walters, a Portland operations manager, who put the team's work into action.

Dean Miller, Brad Williams and Tom Eyford. Three of the brightest bulbs in the box.

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Saturday, Nov. 6, 10a.m. - 6p.m.
Sunday, Nov. 7, 10a.m. - 3p.m.



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