

AUB studies reveal Lebanese are getting fatter

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Lebanon will face an epidemic of obesity-related illnesses, if adults, adolescents, and children continue to put on weight, according to two national obesity surveys carried out by AUB. Through collaborative efforts between the Nutrition and Food Science Department at the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences (FAFS) and the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS), two studies, in 1997 and 2008, showed an alarming trend in the percentage of the population which is overweight.

Results showed that 53 percent of people over 20 were overweight in 1997, a figure that continues to grow. A two-fold increase was observed from 1997 to 2008 among the elderly population and the percentage of overweight youths (aged 6-19) grew from 20 percent in 1997 to 35 percent in 2008, with a doubling in obesity rates.

The studies found that the Lebanese population will face a spate of obesity-related illnesses if current trends continue. Although being overweight should be considered a disease on its own, it is also one of the key risk factors for other conditions including type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and some forms of cancer.

Obesity in Lebanon is mainly due to poor dietary practices, consisting of a high-fat diet and consumption of soda drinks, the studies found. Researchers revealed that adults who were the least educated and married were also more prone to being overweight. As for adolescents and children, the majority who were least physically active had the highest rates of being overweight. According to Dean Nahla Hwalla at the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences (FAFS), there was a need to draw on the latest scientific evidence to recommend mobilization efforts to the government, international agencies, and local communities.

In addition, preventive action is needed to reduce the prevalence of overweight people through proper educational practices, public health campaigns, and intervention programs.