

Scientists: Diet and exercise alone won't fix obesity



The alarming commentary from four physicians states that the body vigorously fights back against efforts to lose weight, resulting in less than 1 percent of obese adults ever getting back to their former weight.

Dan Taylor | Science Recorder | February 14, 2015

Most people think that the obese are simply failing to follow a proper regimen of diet and exercise, but a group of respected physicians are challenging that assertion in a commentary published this week.

About 79 million adults and 13 million kids are obese in the United States, and most are instructed to eat less and become more active, but this is not likely to work, the doctors say according to a **Los Angeles Times report**.

The commentary, published in the journal *Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology*, states that once obesity has been established, body weight becomes more biologically "stamped in," wrote Christopher N. Ochner, a Mt. Sinai Hospital weight management physician, as well as colleagues from the University of Pennsylvania, University of Colorado, and Northwestern University.

The human body has evolved ways to keep weight on, originally to help the body survive during periods of food scarcity. Any attempts to lose weight that has been put on will result in a "powering down" of the body, where it conserves its calories and starts sending out hormones that increase hunger.

As a result, few individuals recover from obesity, and even those that do merely have "obesity in remission," the authors wrote, and they are biologically different from others despite having the same age, sex, and body weight. It means a lifetime of being at war with one's own body to stay at the current weight.

In fact, the average obese adult has less than a 1 percent chance of getting back to a healthy body weight without surgery.

The four scientists say they are reinforcing this fact not only to keep people from being stigmatized for obesity, but to keep clinicians who believe it's a personal choice from giving them the wrong advice.

While it's a good idea to encourage patients to eat less and move more, they should also discuss a range of medications with obese patients and possibly recommend surgery to supplement a diet and exercise regimen. Also, once the weight is lost, weight-loss maintenance should become a part of obesity treatment.

Meanwhile, the health industry should do more to find an effective treatment for weight loss.

The bottom line is that everyone wants a fix for obesity, but “eat less, move more” is not the answer, as one of the scientists put it.

