

Fat Tax Urged in 'War on Obesity'

"*Obesity: The Public Health Crisis*" was the name of a conference held in Washington DC September 14-15 by the *American Obesity Association*. Obesity was described as a "ticking time bomb in the health care system." For the first time since the Civil War, American life expectancy is projected to decrease, owing to the diseases associated with obesity.

According to this Association, more than half of adult Americans, about 97 million, are estimated to be overweight. Of those, 39 million are considered obese or more than 30 pounds overweight. More than 20 percent of children are overweight, a number that has doubled in recent decades. Extra pounds are more than unsightly. They contribute to 300,000 deaths each year. The annual cost of treating health problems related to obesity has been estimated at \$100 billion.

Among the attendees was the U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher, who declared: "*Obesity is a major public health problem in this country and one that urgently deserves much more attention than it receives*". Judith S. Stern, vice president of the American Obesity Association, described obesity as "*a national emergency*" and stated "*while we have this two-day meeting, 1,800 people will be dead from problems related to obesity*".

Some proposals from the convention were lengthening the school day to give kids more exercise, bans on advertising unhealthy foodstuffs, a massive increase in tax-funded research on obesity and expanded insurance for weight loss treatments. However, the main proposal was the "fat-tax"- a tax on high-fat foods, similar to existing taxes on cigarettes and alcohol. The tax would discourage the purchase of such foods, and fund various programs to help the food-addicted.

Yes, you can hear it coming: the fat tax is gaining ground in the USA. How long before our rulers simply outlaw fatty foods outright? How long before the Federal Fat Police (FFP) begin searching our cars for candy, invading our homes to halt the preparation of cherry pie, and forcing mandatory random weighing tests to uncover fat addicts? How long before the U.S. military is ordered to seal our borders against smugglers of lard and coconut oil? How long before a fat-free America -maintained at gunpoint- becomes a national goal, lauded by Democrats, Republicans, and Chambers of Commerce across the land?

Given America's experiences with alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes, we'd say... oh, any day now.

1. Answer the questions. Use your own words whenever possible (2 points).

- a. Which are the two main aims of the fat-tax?
- b. The author of the text is for or against a fat-tax? Why?

2. Read the following statements, decide whether they are true or false and justify your answer by quoting evidence from the text (2 points, 0,50 each).

- a. Obesity threatens to shorten American life-span.
- b. Extra pounds are not unattractive.
- c. David Satcher believes that the time has come for the nation to get serious about obesity.
- d. One of the proposals was to prohibit junk food advertising.

3. Find in the text the word or group of words which match these definitions (1 point, 0, 20 each).

- a. The providing of medical services.
- b. A detailed study of a subject in order to discover information or achieve a new understanding of it.
- c. Becoming more popular or accepted.
- d. Sweet food made of sugar or chocolate, or a piece of this.
- e. Happening or done by chance rather than according to a plan.

4. Complete the text using the correct words from the box below. There are 2 words that you won't need (2 points, 0, 25 each).

According to a report of the American Medical Association, the prevalence of obesity in the U. S. a. _____ continues to increase at an alarming rate. The report describes the results of a survey conducted in 1999 and 2000 b. _____ 4115 men and women, and compares these results to c. _____ of a similar survey conducted from 1988 to 1994. Their results show a significant increase in obesity just over the past d. _____ years and represent a continuation of a e. _____ trend that began in the late 1970s or early 1980s. f. _____ overweight has significant medical consequences, and the more overweight you are, the g. _____ the consequences. h. _____, the definition of "overweight" used in these studies is based on the weight at which increased medical risk begins to occur.

a few	disturbing	being	greater	in fact	population
among	those	few	having		

5. Write a composition of about 150 words on ONE of the following topics (3 points).

- a. Write a letter to an obese friend. Give him/her advice about why he/she should lose weight and about what he/she could do in order to achieve this aim.
- b. In your opinion, what are the causes and consequences of a fat society? What proposals might help in the "war on obesity"?