

Bookmarks: Obesity

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Web sites covering obesity, a major area of health concern world-wide.

Obesity is becoming a major area of concern. Recent campaigns to improve childhood nutrition along with a general recognition that there is a world-wide problem with obesity means that it is a topic that always seems to be in the news.

According to the excellent BBC Science Hottopics,¹ over 30,000 deaths a year are caused by obesity in England alone. A study by the National Audit Office in 2002 estimated that the condition costs the NHS £500 million a year. Other sites such as the World Health Organization Obesity site² emphasise the global issue of 300 million obese individuals world-wide.

Undertaking a review of the Web sites available on this topic was quite an interesting project. Much of the UK patient information available seemed quite repetitive and unsympathetic. It appeared that very few of the sites looked at the wider causes of the condition and that the problem may lie in how we perceive the whole topic. For example, if you compare sites dealing with obesity with similar ones on alcoholism, where there has been a recognition amongst many clinicians that the problem is a disease, you see a more sympathetic and pro-active approach to treatment.

For health professionals, the *BMJ* Clinical Evidence site³ outlines the scale of the issue, incidence, risk factors, prognosis and interventions. At the time of writing, the NHS partnership with Clinical Evidence is coming to a close – leaving a gap in evidence that will concern many health professionals. The excellent *BMJ* Collected Resources⁴ has a section on obesity giving links to *BMJ* articles on the subject. I use the Collected Resources a lot as they are a way of keeping up to date with a topic and identifying core articles.

For patients, there are some very good resources – an example of this is Best Treatments⁵ which looks at a health issue in detail, identifying

treatment, symptoms and diagnosis. I particularly liked the section with questions to ask your doctor. The BUPA 'Avoiding Childhood Obesity' site⁶ talks through the dangers of being overweight and advises on healthy food. Its solutions to the problem such as children joining a leisure centre to lose weight or advice that 'fizzy drinks may contain a lot of sugar' were well intentioned but hardly ground breaking.

The NHS Direct Online service⁷ has a specific section on obesity. As a patient information site it is very useful and gives much helpful advice and background to the topic. The section on causes is very interesting and talks at length about poor diet and life-style choices and details how, for example, office workers tend to put on weight easily. Similarly, Prodigy⁸ has a section on the subject, but covers the same ground in terms of causes and ways of losing weight.

One of the issues not discussed in the sites is how portions of food in restaurants have increased over recent years. The 'Portion Distortion' site⁹ shows how much portions of food have increased and uses food photographs to give you an idea of the increased amount of food on your plate.

The independent charity Weight Concern¹⁰ seemed to have a very different and possibly more balanced approach to the issue. Weight Concern brings together psychologists,

dieticians and health specialists to help patients control their weight. It campaigns to develop new treatments for obesity focusing on the obese person as more of an individual. Unusually for this topic, they campaign for people to improve their health but to feel good about themselves whatever their weight – very different to patient information seen elsewhere. I felt that the site was excellent with some really interesting approaches to the issue.

In terms of associations, the Association for the Study of Obesity¹¹ is an interesting site. It states that it aims to promote professional awareness of obesity and to prioritise obesity as an issue in the UK. The Web site includes the Obesity Resource Information Centre which has a number of useful fact sheets. Some explain inherited obesity and why people put on weight as well as practical advice on diet and nutrition. Other associations such as The European Association for the Study of Obesity¹² and the North American Association for the Study of Obesity¹³ cover similar ground in terms of promoting research and lobbying.

In closing, if you find this all a little depressing as you tuck into your cream cake, take a look at the wonderful 'Triumphing over Obesity' site¹⁴ which has the classic Orson Welles quote: *'My doctor told me to stop having intimate dinners for four – unless there are three other people there.'*

Web sites

1. <www.bbc.co.uk/science/hottopics/obesity/index.shtml>.
2. <www.who.int/hpr/NPH/docs/gs_obesity.pdf>.
3. <www.clinicalevidence.com>.
4. <www.bmj.com/cgi/collection/obesity>.
5. <<http://www.besttreatments.co.uk/btuk/conditions/12911.jsp>>.
6. <http://hcd2.bupa.co.uk/fact_sheets/mosby_factsheets/child_obesity.html>.
7. <<http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/articles/article.aspx?articleid=265>>.
8. <<http://www.prodigy.nhs.uk/obesity>>.
9. <<http://hp2010.nhlbihin.net/portion>>.
10. <www.weightconcern.org.uk>.
11. <<http://aso.org.uk>>.
12. <www.easoobesity.org>.
13. <www.naaso.org>.
14. <www.broadcaster.org.uk/section1/scenarios/obesity.html>.