

Committee: Health
Question: Obesity
Author: Japan

Nowadays, obesity is a big issue in most of the OECD (*Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*) countries. In Japan, 25.5% of men and 20.5% of women over 15 are obese, in France, 14.5% of the adult population is obese and in the United States of America, this figure can reach up to 27.7%. Yet, many researches show that obesity doubles the risk of not having an active normal life and causes problems. Japan's position is to fight against obesity and to help the people who suffer from it.

First of all, the economic development of countries has changed the ways of life and of consuming of the populations. This is the first cause of obesity as the rise in agricultural productivity has reduced the cost of food (and especially of the meat), which has considerably increased its consumption. At the same time, the changes in working conditions and the ways of life have led to consuming fat food (fizzy drinks, snacks, chocolate bars, frozen foods, fast foods...) has progressed in a spectacular way in developed countries. In Japan, rise in the basic food and eating habits are healthier than in western countries. However, their influence is strong.

What's more, obesity also has social causes. As a matter of fact, it is more frequent among the poorest and least educated populations (according to the 2010 OECD report, in several countries, people with a lower level of education are two or three times more likely to be overweight than educated people). Moreover, children who usually have the same harmful eating habits and the sedentary way of life as their parents are more likely to become obese too. Therefore, even if this may partly have a genetic cause in several OECD countries in 2010, children whose parents suffer from obesity are 3 or 4 times more likely to be obese. To limit this, Japan voted a law against obesity which obliges people to go on a diet and eat healthy food. What's for, the country also relies on education to warn people on the issue of obesity and do prevention.

Finally, governmental policies also played a part in this increase in obesity, though against their will. Actually, some inner city policies bring about urban areas devoided of any shopping zone, which compels people to use their car for everything (going to work, giving children a lift to school, going shopping...). It's the same for any public transport policy in general which all take it for granted that hardly anyone goes on foot nowadays. In Japan, there are 73,9 million cars for 127 million inhabitants, which shows how important movement is.

The consequence of all this is that, in those countries where obesity is high, so are the costs in terms of public health. In order to reduce these costs, Japan voted a law to limit the waist (85 cm for the men, 90 for the women). Those who go beyond this limit may be punished, which drives them to undergo a treatment of some kind.

Finally, obesity can be a source of strong discriminations, when being hired and in terms of salary too because employers expect a lesser productivity from the people affected by this illness. Obese people earn up to 18% less than people with a normal weight. The OECD has offered several strategies to solve these problems but so far none of them has really proved efficient.