

Weighing in on Health and Fitness: Lakeland Comprehensive Weight Loss Center

Obesity is a serious chronic disease that has reached epidemic proportions in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 66 percent of people over 20 years of age, or approximately 130 million Americans, are overweight or obese. **Michael**

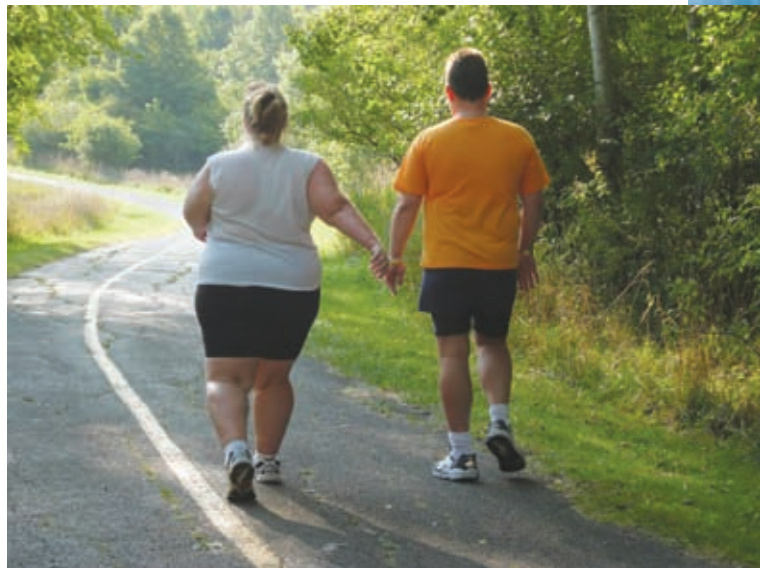
Schuhknecht, DO, FACOS, bariatric surgeon at Lakeland HealthCare's new Lakeland Comprehensive Weight Loss Center, says,

"In 1900, 5 percent of Americans were overweight and virtually none were morbidly

obese. Today, 5 percent—16 million individuals—are morbidly obese."

Schuhknecht points out that obesity is the number one cause of preventable death in this country. "We also see obesity affecting and killing younger and younger people. Our children's generation is likely to have a shorter life expectancy than ours because of obesity," he says.

Changes in lifestyles over the past few decades, such as reduced demands for physical work, an increase in dining out, and consuming fast foods, have led to an increase in the weight of the average American. The CDC reported that the proportion of overweight adults increased 50 percent in ten years. In addition, between 1976 and 2000, the proportion of overweight children more than doubled. The CDC estimates 3,000 Americans per year die from complications related to obesity, and the country spends 117 billion dollars each year on diseases related to overweight and obesity.



"Directly related to the rise in obesity, we see an increase in the incidence of obesity-related comorbidities, including diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stroke, colon cancer, postmenopausal breast cancer, osteoarthritis, and a variety of other health problems," Schuhknecht adds.

Management of morbid obesity using behavioral and pharmacological therapies alone has generally failed to be effective. The addition of bariatric surgery has been effective in sustaining weight loss in morbidly obese individuals. Bariatric surgical procedures fall into three categories: restrictive procedures make the stomach smaller to limit the amount of food intake, malabsorptive techniques reduce the amount of intestine that comes in contact with food so that the body absorbs fewer calories, and combination operations employ both restriction and malabsorption.

Restrictive procedures, which include adjustable gastric banding (Lap-Band) and vertical banded gastroplasty, encourage weight loss in two ways: reducing the amount of food the person can eat and slowing the speed at which food empties from the stomach. Gastric bypass procedures,