

## **Obesity Synthesis Exercise**

Forbes magazine cites government statistics to say that "the average weight of an American has increased 24 pounds since 1960." As the obesity rate in America grows along with healthcare costs, obesity has become an issue in our national discourse. First Lady Michelle Obama has initiated a campaign to address childhood obesity.

Carefully read the following seven sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then synthesize information from at least four of the sources and incorporate it into a coherent, well-developed essay that develops a position on the extent of the role society and/or government should play in the obesity issue.

Make sure that your argument is central; use the sources to illustrate and support your reasoning. Avoid merely summarizing the sources. Indicate clearly which sources you are drawing from, whether through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. You may cite the sources as Source A, Source B, etc., or by using the descriptions in parentheses.

- Source A (ABA)
- Source B (Stewart)
- Source C (Barrett)
- Source D (Paulos)
- Source E (Shallow Nation)
- Source F (Li)
- Source G (Kiderra)

## Source A

American Beverage Assn. (ABA) "School Beverage Guidelines": March 8, 2010.  
<<http://www.ameribev.org/nutrition--science/school-beverage-guidelines/the-guidelines/>>

### **ABA School Beverage Guidelines provide the following beverages:**

#### **Elementary Schools**

- Bottled water
- Up to 8 ounce servings of milk and 100% juice
- Fat-free or low-fat regular and flavored milk and nutritionally equivalent (per USDA) milk alternatives with up to 150 calories/ 8 ounces
- 100% juice with no added sweeteners, up to 120 calories / 8 ounces, and with at least 10% of the recommended daily value for three or more vitamins and minerals

#### **Middle School**

- Same as elementary school, except juice and milk may be sold in 10 ounce servings
- As a practical matter, if middle school and high school students have shared access to areas on a common campus or in common buildings, then the school community has the option to adopt the high school standard

#### **High School**

- Bottled water
- No- or low-calorie beverages with up to 10 calories / 8 ounces
- Up to 12 ounce servings of milk, 100% juice and certain other drinks
- Fat-free or low-fat regular and flavored milk and nutritionally equivalent (per USDA) milk alternatives with up to 150 calories / 8 ounces\*
- 100% juice with no added sweeteners, up to 120 calories / 8 ounces, and with at least 10% of the recommended daily value for three or more vitamins and minerals
- Other drinks with no more than 66 calories / 8 ounces
- At least 50% of non-milk beverages must be water and no- or low-calorie options

#### **Time of Day**

- These guidelines apply to all beverages sold on school grounds during the regular and extended school day.
- The extended school day includes before and after school activities like clubs, yearbook, band, student government, drama and childcare/latchkey programs.
- These guidelines do not apply to school-related events where parents and other adults are part of an audience or are selling beverages as boosters during intermission, as well as immediately before or after an event. Examples of these events include school plays and band concerts.

### Source B

Stewart, Emily "Stop Complaining About Airline Food." Forbes.com. August 11, 2008. March 14, 2010. < <http://www.forbes.com/forbes/2008/0811/040.html>>

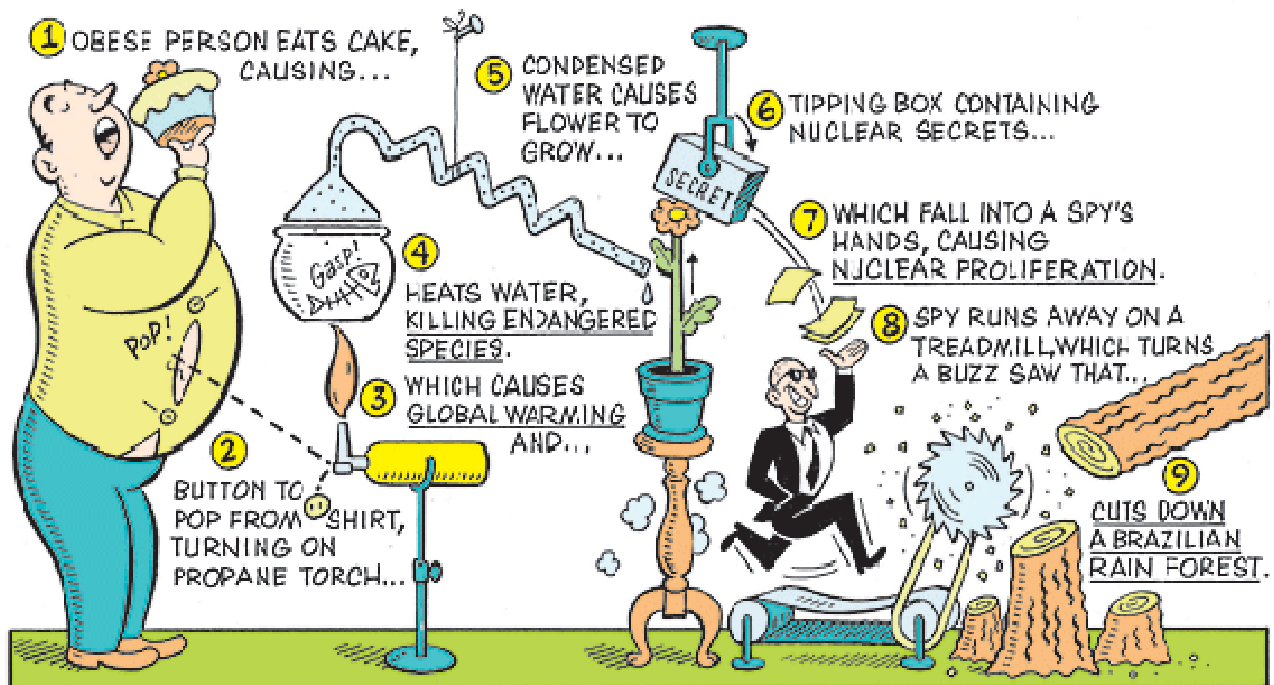
Airlines are doing all sorts of stuff to lighten their planes to offset soaring fuel prices, like getting rid of bulky snacks, waste bins or even rows of seats. Maybe they should be spending money on diet classes for their passengers. According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, the average weight of an American has increased 24 pounds since 1960. That's enough, it seems, to eat up any good obtained from thinning out a plane. JetBlue Airways, for instance, says it cut 1,079 excess pounds from its Airbus A320. But with 119 of the A320's 150 seats typically full, a JetBlue plane must schlep 2,856 extra pounds worth of paunches.

Airlines flew 735 million passengers last year. Multiply that by 24 pounds and airlines are flying 17.6 billion pounds of extra weight around. It takes roughly a gallon of jet fuel to move 100 pounds on a domestic flight. That means 176.4 million gallons of fuel, costing \$538 million (at an industry average price of \$3.05 a gallon). And what would Al Gore say about the resulting megatons of CO<sub>2</sub>?

### Source C

Barrett, Ron "How Obese People are Responsible for Everything Bad." nytimes.com. October 29, 2006 < [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/29/weekinreview/29kolata.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/29/weekinreview/29kolata.html?_r=1)>

## HOW OBESE PEOPLE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR EVERYTHING BAD



## Source D

Paulos, Leah. "The Language of Fat: Are You Constantly Criticizing Your Body?"  
findarticles.com. *Scholastic Choices* April-May 2006 v21 i6 p6(6)  
< [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_hb3415/is\\_6\\_21/ai\\_n29254622/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb3415/is_6_21/ai_n29254622/)>

Shauna Thompson, 17, has always loved to perform and sing, but she still would get really nervous when it was time to get up on stage at church. "My mind would be racing with thoughts, but they were about my body and my weight--not about being scared," Shauna tells *Choices*. "I'd repeat to myself, 'You're so fat' or 'Your butt looks huge.' It totally ruined my confidence."

It may sound weird, but Shauna was doing something many people do. She was using the "language of fat"--negative words and phrases about one's body to express her innermost emotions. In Shauna's case, it led to many hours of moping in front of the mirror, endless exercise, and unhappy feelings about the way she looked or felt. Thankfully, Shauna got control of the issue and has learned to talk and think differently now. "I just don't beat myself up with words anymore," she says.

The language of fat is widespread, especially among teenage girls and women. It's also the subject of a book called *Do I Look Fat in This?* by Jessica Weiner. Based on extensive research, as well as her own experience with body issues, Weiner writes a lot about how damaging and persuasive it is.

"We all speak the secret language of fat, even when we don't realize it," she says. "You hear people say, 'I feel fat' so many times a day. But fat is not a feeling!" According to Weiner, mistaking fat for a feeling can bring on a sense of body loathing, depression, and low self-esteem.

Weiner offers many examples of how using the language of fat can spiral out of control. Perhaps a girl wakes up and thinks, "Yuck, I'm fat." Then she goes to school and talks to her friend about it. In the hall, they gossip about a classmate's weight. Then she goes to lunch and eats three pieces of pizza to make herself feel better. It works for a second; then she feels even worse about herself. "It's amazing how much mental and emotional space these kinds of body-hating thoughts and feelings can take up," Weiner says. And at its worst, the language of fat can lead a person to self-mutilation, substance abuse, and the development of eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia.

### A Guy Problem Too

The language of fat is not a problem exclusively for girls. Weiner offers this example: A guy might think to himself, "I'm not cut enough. I have chicken legs." He's feeling bad about himself, so then he gets aggressive with a younger kid in the school parking lot. Or maybe he holds his feelings in and is feeling so discouraged that he doesn't ask out the girl he likes because of his low self-esteem. "He'd be a lot better off if he didn't berate himself about his body," Weiner says.

Why do teens use the language of fat? It's easier to speak negatively about your body than it is to talk about what's really bothering you. Think about it: It's easier to say, "I feel so gross in this outfit" than to say "I am really depressed because I have no plans this weekend." But very often, when we say things like the former, we are really trying to express things like the latter. "Fat" has become a catchall phrase for negative emotions. We need to stop using the word in that way.

The first step in solving this problem is to recognize that this language exists, advises Weiner. "Then you have to pay attention to how much and when you use it, so you can recognize your feelings," she says.

### Source E

Shallow Nation “Barbie 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.” March 9, 2009. WorldPress.  
< <http://www.shalldownation.com/2009/03/09/barbie-50th-anniversary-barbie-photos-video/> >

Barbie’s 50th anniversary was March 9, 2009. The landmark fashion doll and cultural icon launched in 1959 has been far more than a valued toy or a collector’s item; she has followed trends and set them. For good reason, she reigns as no. 41 on “The 101 Most Influential People Who Never Lived” list.

Barbie has inspired or amused more than 70 designers including Calvin Klein, Dolce & Gabbana, Vera Wang and Versace. Among those designers who paid tribute to the Barbie 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary was legendary designer Karl Lagerfeld who designed a special Barbie collection displayed in Paris, France during March of 2009.



## Source F

Li, David K. "NJ Woman Attempting to be World's Fattest" *New York Post*. March 15, 2010  
NYP Holdings

[http://www.nypost.com/p/news/local/nj\\_woman\\_attempting\\_to\\_become\\_world\\_pco3O4qPWicG3yjEWaxx9N](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/local/nj_woman_attempting_to_become_world_pco3O4qPWicG3yjEWaxx9N)

A New Jersey woman, who now tips the scales at 604 pounds, said it'd be a "fantasy" to gobble her way to fame and someday weigh 1,000 pounds.

"When you have a 3-year-old daughter and you're trying to run a household, things like this tend to be a fantasy," Simpson told *The Post* today.

The 42-year-old Old Bridge resident insists she has no realistic hopes of ever making 1,000 pounds, but will try her best to consume, wolf, munch and devour her way to hog heaven.

It's such a hefty task, that Simpson would have to consume Jets coach Rex Ryan — 350 pounds before his stomach-staple surgery this past weekend — just to get close.

"This whole thousand-pound goal has gotten blown way out of proportion," Simpson said of her pie-in-the-sky dreams.

"This is a fantasy of mine. It's not reality, yet everyone takes this and runs with it."

Simpson claims she only wants to be recognized as the heaviest woman to ever give birth.

She weighed 532 pounds in 2007 when her daughter Jacqueline was born.

A rep for the Guinness World Record said there is no category for biggest birth mom, but the UK-based outfit has received paperwork from Simpson — asking to be named biggest to give birth and heaviest living woman.

Guinness is thinking about creating a biggest birth mom category and considering Simpson's application to be named largest living woman.

The biggest woman ever recorded was Rosalie Bradford, of Auburndale, Fla., who weighed in at 1,199 pounds in 1987. Before Bradford died at age 63 in 2007, she was the heaviest living woman.

Guinness denies it's encouraging Simpson and other freaks, only chronicling what they'd be doing naturally.

"We're not pushing people out there to eat, we're in no way asking them to live an unhealthy lifestyle," said Guinness spokeswoman Jamie Panas.

"From our point of view, these people are out there and we're just reporting it like you are. We're just impartially chronicling superlatives."

Panas admitted, however, that Guinness had to end a category for fattest pet, fearing that owners were stuffing their furry, four-legged pals just for a record.

In her "fantasy," Simpson would zoom up to 1,000 in two years with a steady diet of 12,000 calories per day. An average woman should consume no more than 2,000.

"My favorite food is sushi, but unlike others I can sit and eat 70 big pieces of sushi in one go," she told *London's Daily Mail*. "I do love cakes and sweet things, doughnuts are my favorite."

To help pick up the tab on her \$750-a-week eating habit, Simpson puts herself on the Internet where people can pay to watch her eat.

"I love eating and people love watching me eat," she told the British newspaper. "It makes people happy, and I'm not harming anyone."

Simpson said her 49-year-old, 150-pound boyfriend Philippe Gouamba, has encouraged her to eat more.

"I think he'd like it if I was bigger," she added. "He's a real belly man, and completely supports me."

## Source G

Kiderra, Inga “Obesity is ‘Socially Contagious,’ Study Finds” UCSD News Center. July 25, 2007. University of California San Diego < <http://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/newsrel/soc/07-07ObesityIK-.asp> >

Appearing in the July 26 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, a study coauthored by Nicholas Christakis of Harvard Medical School and James Fowler of UC San Diego suggests that obesity is “socially contagious,” spreading from person to person in a social network.

The study – the first to examine this phenomenon – finds that if one person becomes obese, those closely connected to them have a greater chance of becoming obese themselves. Surprisingly, the greatest effect is seen not among people sharing the same genes or the same household but among friends.

If a person you consider a friend becomes obese, the researchers found, your own chances of becoming obese go up 57 percent. Among mutual friends, the effect is even stronger, with chances increasing 171 percent.

Christakis and Fowler also looked at the influence of siblings, spouses and neighbors. Among siblings, if one becomes obese, the likelihood for the other to become obese increases 40 percent; among spouses, 37 percent. There was no effect among neighbors, unless they were also friends.

The researchers analyzed data over a period of 32 years for 12,067 adults, who underwent repeated medical assessments as part of the Framingham Heart Study. They were able to map a densely interconnected social network of the study’s subjects by using the tracking sheets (which had previously been archived in a basement) that recorded not only the subjects’ family members but also unrelated friends who could be expected to find them in a few years. ...

“It’s not that obese or non-obese people simply find other similar people to hang out with,” said Christakis, a physician and a professor in Harvard Medical School’s department of health care policy. “Rather, there is a direct, causal relationship,”

Further analysis also suggested that people’s influence on each other’s obesity status could not be put down just to similarities in lifestyle and environment, to, for example, people eating the same foods together or engaging in the same physical activities. Not only do siblings and spouses have less influence than friends, but also geography doesn’t play a role. The striking impact of friends seems to be independent of whether or not the friends live in the same region.

“When we looked at the effect of distance, we found that your friend who’s 500 miles away has just as much impact on your obesity as [one] next door,” said Fowler, an associate professor of political science at UC San Diego and an expert in social networks.

In part because the study also identifies a larger effect among people of the same sex, the researchers believe that people affect not only each other’s behaviors but also, more subtly, norms.

“What appears to be happening is that a person becoming obese most likely causes a change of norms about what counts as an appropriate body size. People come to think that it is okay to be bigger since those around them are bigger, and this sensibility spreads,” said Christakis.

“This is about people’s ideas about their bodies and their health,” Fowler said. “Consciously or unconsciously, people look to others when they are deciding how much to eat, how much to exercise and how much weight is too much.”

“Social effects, I think, are much stronger than people before realized. There’s been an intensive effort to find genes that are responsible for obesity and physical processes that are responsible for obesity and what our paper suggests is that you really should spend time looking at the social side of life as well,” said Fowler. ...

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