

## READING PASSAGE 1

*You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 1-13**, which are based on Reading Passage 1.*

### **Obesity: Do citizens of developed countries really have a choice?**

According to researchers, we may not have much control over what and how much we eat. Numerous recent studies show that Americans are tatter than ever before. According to the OECD\*, US citizens are more likely to be obese than those in any other nation - though other highly developed countries are following the trend. The figures raise the question of what cultural shift has occurred to make Americans eat so enthusiastically.

Marion Nestle, a nutritionist, argues that the desire to reach for the next hamburger may be more commercially driven than people like to admit. Nestle attributes part of the blame for ever-expanding waists to the food industry - from fertiliser manufacturers to farmers to restaurants - which needs to promote the consumption of ever greater quantities to remain competitive, increase sales, and keep shareholders happy. Even alter accounting for imports and exports, Nestle writes, America produces far more food than its citizens need. The US food industry provides a daily average of 3,800 calories per person, twice an individual's requirement.

With such an oversupply on hand, the food industry has resorted to whatever tools it can to sell its products to the American public. Soft-drink companies use their economic power to get vending machines into schools, chocolate-bar makers hood us with advertising, and industry lobby groups help write nutritional guidelines - all of which get Americans eating and drinking more.

The tactics work. According to the US Department of Agriculture, each American now consumes an average at 86kg of red meat, poultry, and fish each year, up 5 5kg from 20 years ago. More surprising still, the average American uses 68kg of sweeteners such as refined sugar and corn syrup each year, up horn 55 5kg in 1910. According to the Center tot Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) in Atlanta, Georgia, that results in more than 30 per cent of men and women in America being classified as obese, more than twice as many as 40 years ago. That gain in weight has cut across all age groups, income strata, and racial, professional and regional divisions, though some groups are affected more than others. The overweight can now be found everywhere.

The current politically correct acceptance of obesity overlooks one important fact. According to Professor Gortmaker, cardiovascular disease and hypertension are just two of the conditions that researchers have connected with obesity, and people need to be aware of the health risk. And it is not a marginal problem. The total cost in direct expenses, such as medical bills, and indirect expenses, such as lost wages due to obesity-related problems, is close to \$100 billion a year, according to the US government's National Institutes of Health (NIH). An additional \$33 billion is spent on weight-toss products and services. But Americans continue to eat more, and do little or nothing about it. According to the NIH, only 15 per cent of Americans get the recommended amount of vigorous" activity each week, and a quartet reported no physical activity at all outside of work.

Gortmaker classifies obesity as a 'chronic health condition' similar to asthma. However he says, asthma sufferers usually seek professional medical help, while those suffering from obesity rarely do unless they are experiencing serious problems.

The condition is defined in terms of Body Mass Index (BMI), a measure of body fat that compares height to weight. A BMI of 20-25 is considered normal, 25-30 overweight and above 30 obese.

Some economists accept obesity and its risks as the price of progress. Darius Lakdawalla locates the roots of American weight gain in technological change. He argues that agricultural technology has brought down the cost of food, and because it is less costly, Americans eat more. 'it's becoming easier to consume lots of calories with very small amounts of money and very small amounts of time,' says Lakdawalla.

At the same time Philipson points out that technological advances in the work place have made Americans' lives less strenuous, causing people to burn fewer calories than they once did. He has plotted the rise in America's weight using data stretching back to the American Civil War. He found that the average BMI rose steadily and then accelerated after the Second World War. A 35-year old male had a BMI of just over 23 in 1864. It edged up to 23 and three quarters by 1944, and then shot up to 26 by 1991. The obesity epidemic can be traced to the way the US economy gets children to consume more and also to be more sedentary. If we sit children in front of the television, and we feed them at fast food outlets, and we provide sweetened drink machines at school, do children have a choice?

Geoffrey Sobel, a sociologist, says that marriage can have the same effect on women. 'When couples marry, they consume a high proportion of their calories together,' says Sobel. 'The new household diet is typically the man's diet. Features of the feminine diet like sated and yoghurt are reduced.'

Where exercise was once the natural by-product of work and life, it is now a luxury that must be paid for either in money or time or both. In poor countries, body weight generally increases with wealth. But in developed economies, the very rich are often actually thinner because they can afford to exercise. Is the upward trend in body mass a side-effect of economic development - the price we pay for enjoying technology?

\*OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

### Questions 1-8

Look at the following findings (Questions 1-8) and the list of researchers/research organizations below.

Match each statement with the correct researcher/research organization, **A-I**.

Write the correct letter, **A-I**, in boxes 1-8 on your answer sheet.

- 1 Business competition drives food consumption.
- 2 Cheaper food production has led to increased food consumption.
- 3 Improved technology makes work less physically demanding.
- 4 Obesity is a serious illness.
- 5 Many Americans are physically active only during their working hours.
- 6 Obese people often consider medical treatment to be unnecessary.
- 7 Obesity is more prevalent in the US than anywhere else.
- 8 The number of obese Americans has doubled in 40 years.

- A** Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
- B** Marion Nestle
- C** US Department of Agriculture
- D** Center for Disease Control and Prevention
- E** Gortmaker
- F** National Institutes of Health
- G** Darius Lakdawalla
- H** Phillipson
- I** Geoffrey Sobel

### Questions 9-13

Do the following statements agree with the claims of the writer in Reading Passage 1?

In boxes 9-13 on your answer sheet, write

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>YES</b>       | <i>if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer</i>        |
| <b>NO</b>        | <i>if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer</i>        |
| <b>NOT GIVEN</b> | <i>if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this</i> |

- 9 The US produces a large food surplus.
- 10 Large companies can impose their marketing on schools.
- 11 Since 1970, the use of sweeteners by the average American has decreased slightly.
- 12 Direct and indirect medical expenses resulting from obesity are the same.
- 13 These days, exercising is time-consuming and costs money.