The Battle of the Bulge

Obesity is no longer an American disease. Globalization’s bounty—economic development, lowered trade costs, and rising incomes—has turned it into a worldwide pandemic for rich and poor alike. If it is left unchecked, the economic health of developing countries will surely be crushed under the weight.

By Kelly D. Brownell and Derek Yach

In countries both rich and poor, people are packing on the pounds. What’s to blame? High-fat foods that are cheap and readily available, lack of exercise, and increasing urbanization. From Rio to Riyadh, scales are tipping from “fit” to “fat.”

As obesity rates soar, so too does the number of people with diabetes. In 1985, diabetes afflicted 30 million people around the world. A decade later, that figure had climbed to 135 million. Between 2000 and 2030, the number of diabetes patients will more than double to 366 million, costing hundreds of billions of dollars in medical care. Unhealthy diets deserve much of the blame. The most recognized foreign brand in China is Kentucky Fried Chicken’s, and 25 percent of all vegetables eaten in the United States are french fries.

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