Worldwide obesity set to worsen

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FATTENING UP: About half of both men and women in the United States will be obese by 2030, health experts warn.

Obesity is most widespread in Britain and the United States among the world's leading economies and if present trends continue, about half of both men and women in the United States will be obese by 2030, health experts warn.

Obesity is fast replacing tobacco as the single most important preventable cause of chronic non-communicable diseases, and will add an extra 7.8 million cases of diabetes, 6.8 million cases of heart disease and stroke, and 539,000 cases of cancer in the United States by 2030.

Some 32 percent of men and 35 percent of women are now obese in the United States, according to a research team led by Claire Wang at the Mailman School of Public Health in Columbia University in New York. They published their findings in a special series of four papers on obesity in The Lancet.

In Britain, obesity rates will balloon to between 41-48 percent for men and 35-43 percent for women by 2030 from what is now 26 percent for both sexes, they warned.

"An extra 668,000 cases of diabetes, 461,000 of heart disease and 130,000 cancer cases would result," they wrote.

Due to overeating and insufficient exercise, obesity is now a growing problem everywhere and experts are warning about its ripple effects on health and healthcare spending.

Obesity raises the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, various cancers, hypertension, high cholesterol, among others.
Because of obesity, the United States can expect to spend an extra 2.6 percent on its overall healthcare bill, or $66 billion per year, while Britain's bill will grow by 2 percent, or 2 billion per year, Wang and colleagues warned.

OBESITY BOMB TICKING EVERYWHERE ELSE TOO

In Japan and China, 1 in 20 women is obese, compared with 1 in 10 in the Netherlands, 1 in 4 in Australia and 7 in 10 in Tonga, according to another paper led by Boyd Swinburn and Gary Sacks of the WHO Collaborating Center for Obesity Prevention at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia.

Worldwide, around 1.5 billion adults are overweight and a further 0.5 billion are obese, with 170 million children classified as overweight or obese. Obesity takes up between 2 to 6 percent of healthcare costs in many countries.

"Increased supply of cheap, tasty, energy-dense food, improved food distribution and marketing, and the strong economic forces driving consumption and growth are the key drivers of the obesity epidemic," Swinburn and Sacks wrote.

The health experts urged governments to lead the fight in reversing the obesity epidemic.

"These include taxes on unhealthy food and drink (such as sugar sweetened beverages) and restrictions on food and beverage TV advertising to children," wrote a team led by Steven Gortmaker at the Harvard School of Public Health, which published the fourth paper in the series.

- Reuters