

Obesity 'a big problem in UAE'

By Anupa Prathap Mathew, 25-08-2001

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There is a need to target the problem of obesity more seriously in the UAE, as it has been found to have a greater impact problem of obesity more seriously in the UAE on health than drinking or smoking according to a new U.S. study, claimed nutritionist Rima Khadra.

She explained that obese individuals were found to have higher rates of chronic medical illness and a poorer quality of life than alcohol abusers, smokers and those living in poverty, according to the new American findings. "These results are quite dramatic and have a huge impact on the UAE, as obesity is a big health problem here," Rima said.

A Ministry of Health study carried out in the last decade on national nutrition revealed that 33 per cent of married women in the UAE were overweight and 38 per cent were obese. Of the married men studied, 40.3 per cent were overweight, but only 15.8 per cent were obese. It was found that around 20 per cent of the population suffers from obesity, which is more than the U.S.

Dr Abdulrahman O Musaiger, director of the Environmental and Biological Programme at the Bahrain Centre for Studies and Research told Gulf News: "Across the UAE, over recent years, there has been a steady increase in food-energy consumption, and a lack of physical exercise is also apparent.

"Overweight and obesity, therefore, have risen dramatically in the country over the past decade. "Obesity is a major health problem in the UAE community, and may play an important role in increasing the occurrence of other chronic diseases."

Obesity leads to several other complications such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, which is one of the leading causes of death in the UAE, according to the Ministry of Health statistics.

Rima said: "There is an urgent need to make more public the campaign against obesity. Greater awareness and public programmes are required. "Obesity has the possibility of assuming epidemic proportions, especially keeping in mind the existing lifestyle of the country's population.

"Lack of enough exercise and high fat content in the diet are the main causes of obesity. "People haven't given the problem of being overweight and obese the same attention as other risks such as smoking, but it is a top health issue.

"The American study analysed data from interviews with adults nationwide regarding their height, weight, income, smoking and drinking habits and chronic medical conditions."

People who smoked throughout their lives and lived in poverty were significantly more likely to have a chronic disease such as asthma, diabetes, arthritis or heart disease. But the effects of smoking and poverty were smaller than the effects of obesity on both a person's health and quality of life.