

The junk food time-bomb that threatens a new generation

Walking up and down the supermarket, Debbie Oackley, 46-year-old mother of three, looked rather tired as she examined the range of cereals. Her six-year-old son, Mathew, insisted on buying two packets with toys inside, and into the trolley they went. The sugary contents didn't seem to matter. "If you've got young children and you work, you can't read the small print because you haven't got time", confessed Oackley.

She admits that her 16 and 18 year old children still avoid the vegetables on their plate and fears that her youngest is going the same way. "Mathew picks things with lots of sugar and it's hard to get them to eat something without sugar content."

Child obesity caused by poor nutrition and lack of exercise is creating a health crisis in Britain. There has never been, in the space of a single generation, such a dramatic deterioration in public health. Junk food and inactivity will inevitably leave thousands of Britons with disabilities, diabetes and heart disease. For the first time in a hundred years life expectancy will actually go down.

Obesity now affects 21 per cent of men and 23 per cent of women in the UK. A further 46 per cent of men and 33 per cent of women are overweight. At least two thirds of our population needs to lose weight, the exact opposite of a century ago, when the same proportion of Britons were underweight through lack of nutrition. As for children, one in 9 is now classified as obese.

If the increase continues, thousands of children will develop diabetes within the next 15 years. Up to 10 million people could be diabetic by 2020. A century ago, the disease was almost unknown, but now it affects three million people – double the number a decade ago.

Faced with this problem, the Government is considering a number of policy measures:

- Reducing fat, salt and sugar in children's food.
- Restricting the amount of advertising of sweets, crisps and snack foods during children's programmes.
- Increasing the number of hours of sport in schools each week.
- Encouraging families to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

1. Describe health crises affecting Britain at the moment, its causes and effects. Use your own words (2 points).

2. Are the following statements true or false? Justify your answer with reference to the text (2 points)

- 1) It was little Mathew who decided what cereals to buy.
- 2) Of the three children Mrs Oackley has, only Mathew prefers sugary food.
- 3) British children growing up today will have a shorter life than their parents.
- 4) A hundred years ago two thirds of the British people were undernourished.
- 5) The number of people affected by diabetes has doubled in the last century.

3. Find in the text the words and expressions whose meaning match the following definitions (1 point).

- 1) a large wheeled metal basket (paragraphs 1-2)
- 2) keep away or refrain from (paragraphs 1-2)
- 3) food with little nutritional value (paragraph 3-4)
- 4) above a normal or desirable weight (paragraphs 3-4)
- 5) a small quantity of food or a light meal (paragraph 5)

4. Rewrite the sentences maintaining the original meaning. Start with the words given in the second line of each pair. (2 points)

- 1) Mathew insisted on buying two packets with free toys inside.
Mathew asked his mother insistently....
- 2) "If you've got young children and you work, you can't read the small print".
If you haven't
- 3) In the space of a single generation, there has never been such a dramatic deterioration in public health.
In the early twentieth century, there....
- 4) Junk food and inactivity will leave thousands of Britons with disabilities.
Thousands of Britons...

5. Write a composition of about 150 words on one of the following topics (3 points)

1. If you believe obesity to be a problem, what in your opinion should be done about it?
2. Imagine you suffer from obesity (or any other food related disorder). Write a letter to a magazine explaining your situation and asking for advice.

Answers

Question 1:

The main health problem that affects British people nowadays is obesity. The number of overweight people is increasing steadily and the authorities are getting worried about it. This is caused by the excessive amount of junk food and sugar content eaten by the population and the lack of exercise. Unfortunately, obesity can develop diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

Question 2:

- 1) True. When Mathew insists on buying the two packets of cereals with free toys inside, his mother puts them into the trolley.
- 2) False. She also finds it difficult to make the other two eat something without sugar content.
- 3) True. For the first time in a hundred years, life expectancy will go down due to a deterioration in public health.
- 4) True. A century ago, two thirds of the British population suffered lack of nutrition.
- 5) False. Diabetes was almost unknown one century ago.

Question 3:

- 1) trolley
- 2) avoid
- 3) junk food
- 4) overweight
- 5) portion

Question 4:

- 1) Mathew asked his mother insistently to buy two packets of cereals with free toys inside.
- 2) If you haven't got time, you can't read the small print.
- 3) In the early twentieth century, there wasn't such a dramatic deterioration in public health.
- 4) Thousands of Britons will be left with disabilities caused by junk food and inactivity.

Question 5:

This is a sample composition on option 1)

Obesity is definitely one of the most extended diseases of our time. Moreover, it brings about other illnesses such as diabetes and heart problems. Therefore, it is not only a matter of physical appearance but also a health issue.

The health authorities could take several measures in order to stop this disease or reduce the number of people affected by it. First, mass media and schools should be used to inform people about the risks of being overweight and the negative effects it has on any person. Then, food producers should be forced to specify clearly the fat and sugar contents of their products, especially in the case of fast food, snacks and sugary drinks.

Probably, it would take some time to raise awareness about the negative effects of some kinds of food. However, through education and clear information on the issue, many people would think of improving their eating habits little by little.