

# Fat of the land

The Vegetarian & Vegan Foundation's senior health campaigner, Amanda Woodvine, explains why the world just keeps on getting fatter...

**O**besity is now the most important nutritional disease in the Western world. And in even the poorest countries it is increasing at an alarming rate. For the first time in human history, the number of overweight people worldwide rivals the number who are underweight.

Obesity isn't just about aesthetics, it is strongly linked to a number of chronic diseases including heart disease, stroke, some cancers, respiratory diseases and diabetes.

Brits started to fatten slowly from about 1920 and then ballooning after the Second World War. It isn't driven by diet alone but it does play a key part. Back then, people ate far more complex carbohydrates in the form of grains, wholemeal bread, potatoes, legumes and all kinds of vegetables and the fat content was modest. Today, they gorge themselves on meat, cheese, butter and other rich milk products and alcohol. As a consequence, the fat content of the diet has risen dramatically.

Fat is energy dense, containing more than twice as many calories, weight-for-weight, as protein or carbohydrate. It is also one of the least filling so in order to feel full, people eat more of it.

The situation is made worse by a lack of knowledge about diet. Chocolate and cakes are the foods most slimmers elbow while ignoring the main source of fat. Meat contributes a staggering 23 per cent of total fat to the average diet! It's become a staple, usurping the role of much healthier carbohydrate-rich foods from yesteryear.

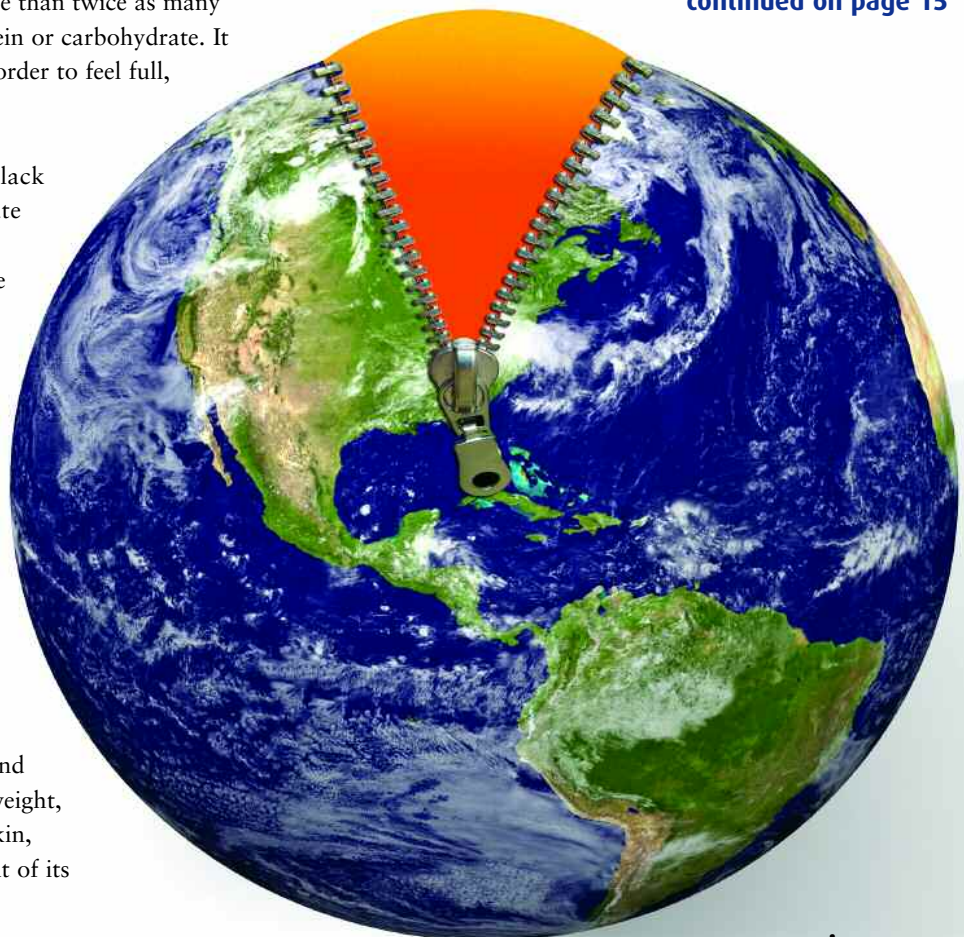
Even meat itself has changed and, portion-for-portion, its fat content has doubled since pre-war days, according to researchers at London Metropolitan University. Even organic poultry contains around 100 kilocalories more, weight-for-weight, than back in 1930. Even without skin, chicken is not low-fat as 23 per cent of its calories are accounted for by fat.

Consume just a few more calories each day than you need and you'll gain weight. Thirty calories too many equals one kilogram (over two pounds) by the end of a year. Over 10 years it adds up to 22 pounds. With people eating more and more high-fat, highly-calorific meat – particularly chicken – it is easy to take in more calories than the body can burn off.

The American Cancer Society followed 75,000 people for a decade and found the food which produced most weight gain was meat. Those eating more than one serving a day were 50 per cent more likely to put on weight around the waist than those who ate meat infrequently.

Which begs the question – how do people lose weight on Atkins-type diets? Monotony and ketosis (a condition the body triggers when it thinks it is starving) play a part. But why put your body through this unhealthy onslaught when a low-fat veggie diet is more successful than Atkins, the Zone diet and even Weight Watchers.

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# A symbol of health

You want to know what's healthy to eat? Well, we've set the standard for food labelling with the launch of four new 'healthy' symbols. They will enable you to see at a glance which products are 100 per cent vegan, are free from GM ingredients and damaging hydrogenated fats and where sugar, fat and salt levels are all within official guidelines.\* Additives linked to asthma, tantrums, hyperactivity and poor concentration in children are also banned.

The only symbols of their kind in the UK, they have been created by the VVF in response to the growing demand for healthy, plant-based products. Their launch has been applauded by the trade press.

We only approve vegan products but manufacturers can choose to label them Healthy Dairy-Free, Healthy Vegan, Healthy Vegetarian or Healthy Vegetarian & Vegan and we will publicise products which carry them.

For more info contact Angie on 0117 970 5190 or email [angie@viva.org.uk](mailto:angie@viva.org.uk)

\* UK Food Standards Agency and EU guidelines



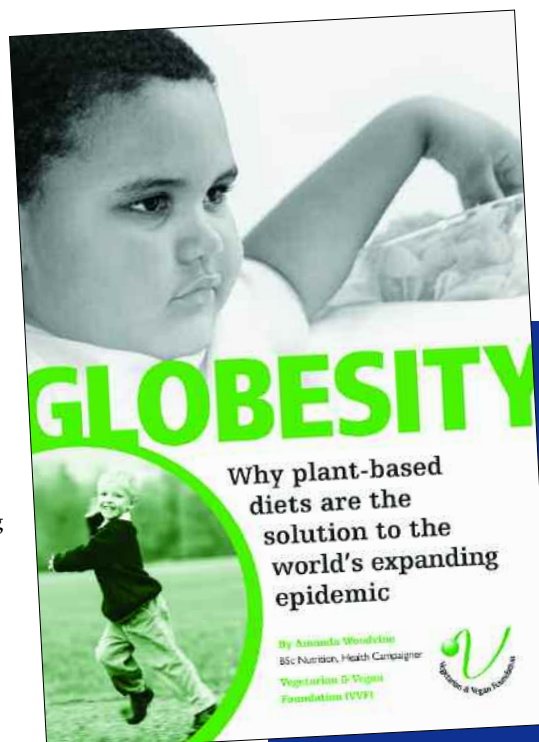
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Forget all your prejudices, the science is crystal clear – vegetarians have remarkably good health with low rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancer and an increased life expectancy. Most overweight people shed pounds when they change to a vegetarian diet despite eating the same weight of food – 1,000 kilograms a year. On average, veggies' BMI is lower by two, meaning they are likely to weigh less and have less body fat than meat eaters. And losing weight this way goes hand-in-hand with long-term good health.

The UK's obesity problem is now being reflected all over the world as poorer countries adopt our diet and sedentary lifestyle. This 'nutrition transition' has led to soaring obesity rates worldwide and a boom in the same chronic diseases. The difference is, they are afflicting ever-younger people and seriously reducing life expectancy.

The solution to both problems is glaringly obvious – we

need to revert to our roots of whole foods, grains, vegetables and legumes, foods that are increasingly being fed to animals to produce meat! This, combined with physical activity, can control weight and improve health but it is a long-term, lifestyle change not another faddy quick-fix.



All this and more is in the VVF's *Globesity* report; (£5.00 including p&p) a scientific call for action. Also read the *V-Plan Diet* (£2.50 inc p&p), loaded with simple advice and inspiring recipes to help you lose weight permanently. To order or for more information on the Globesity campaign, visit [www.vegetarian.org.uk](http://www.vegetarian.org.uk) or write to:

VVF, Top Suite, 8 York Court,  
Wilder Street, Bristol BS2 8QH, or call 0117 970 5190.